

May

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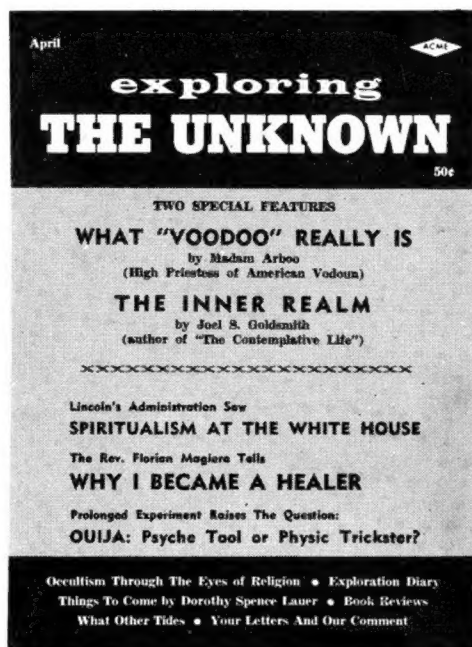
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MAGAZINE OF HORROR AND STRANGE STORIES

Volume 1

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

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Introduction

"There are certain themes of which the interest is all-absorbing, but which are too entirely horrible for the purposes of legitimate fiction. These the mere romanticist must eschew, if he does not wish to offend, or to disgust. They are with propriety handled only when the severity and majesty of truth sanctify and sustain them. We thrill, for example, with the most intense of 'pleasurable pain' over the accounts of the Passage of the Beresina, of the Earthquake at Lisbon, of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, or of the stifling of the hundred and twenty-three prisoners in the Black Hole at Calcutta. But, in these accounts, it is the fact — it is the reality — it is the history which excites. As inventions, we should regard them with simple abhorrence." (Edgar Allen Poe, **The Premature Burial**)

Here is the essence of the ethos of Victorian fiction, stated early in that era (perhaps some years before the date that historians would set as the beginning of the true "Victorian" age), by an author whose stories, in many instances, were considered by his contemporaries as too horrible to be accepted as legitimate fiction. There was such a thing as Victorian realism, as the works of Dickens well attest. But throughout the literature of the period (aside from exhibits which many would consider illegitimate today) there is a strange, unreal quality which is baffling until one remembers the underlying ethos: **there are things which one doesn't speak about**. One does not write about them, and presumably, a lady or gentleman will not even think about them. For the most part, such "things" can be summed up in a single word: sex; but this is not confined to the declarations or descriptions of sexual conduct that are now (relatively) so free in fiction. One also does not speak, write or think about things which in any way suggest sex — and no one could be more susceptible to a wider range of suggestion, it seems, than the Victorians. Nothing must be set forth in fiction which might bring a blush to the maidenly cheek.

Horror, then, in fiction was confined to the intangible or the brutal — that is, considerable blood could be shed, and cruelty portrayed, so long as there was no linkup between such behavior and what psychology has learned to be the underlying drives behind it.

(Turn To Page 128)

Beyond The Breakers

by Anna Hunger

"As a child," Anna Hunger writes in answer to our inquiry, "my grandfather read aloud to me out of Edgar Allan Poe and Mark Twain alternately — does this add up to anything?" Well, perhaps it does, for Miss Hunger has worked on newspapers; directed, written and acted in one-act plays for both radio and various organizations; written articles for local and national magazines (she's a Californian); written science fiction TV shows; a science fiction book, **The Men Who Lived Forever**; and her feature film credits include "The Secret Of Convict Lake", "Pearl of the South Pacific", and "Target". On the personal side, she adds, "I own two lazy poltergeists. One occasionally turns up at midnight smelling like rotten fish while the other stays under the house, beating loudly on the wood from time to time." You can see, that the gal has just the right background for us!

SHE HAD TO do her work early, before any of the guests came downstairs. Aunt Rachel always said that if the guests saw her they might leave the place and she did not intend to lose money over such as Halia. But Halia stole one moment to look out a window and watch

the blue sea frothing white over the Rock. Soon he would be there, on the big Rock, beyond the breakers. Today, or tonight, she was certain. She hurried her cleaning, for there was the kitchen and back porch to scrub, and kindling to split for the great fireplace.

When she had finished it all she went to the only room she had ever known — a shed in the back yard. Here she had tried to do her lessons as a child, but failed, and hated the dry pages, the terrifying black numerals of her arithmetic. Here she had put on a new dress for her first party — and returned home early, broken-hearted. Here she had suffered a dry, racking torment that shook her body and made her ill. And, after a while, her Aunt had taken her out of school, saying that she was needed at home.

Dipping a washrag into an old tin basin full of water, Halia rubbed it slowly over her face. Her skull was extremely narrow, like two convex mirrors placed together, and her huge gray eyes, oval-shaped, protuberant, were set on each side of her skull in an unusual fashion. The room smelled strongly of seaweed and brine, and the odor came from a large, zinc-lined tub next to her bed in which Halia kept her little friends, Anemones, small cowries, sea crab, and other creatures of the sea lived there. Beside it was her skin mask and flippers. These, and some marine maps thumb-tacked on the wall were Halia's only possessions. She did not desire any others.

Getting out of her short, full denim skirt and blouse she slipped on the deep purple garment of coarse, rough cloth that she

liked best. It was bell-shaped, sleeveless, with a low neck and hung from her shoulders, beltless, to the calves of her legs. Under it she was naked. She slipped leather sandals on her feet and hurried out. It was late, and she must not miss him.

At the cliff edge old Adams, the postman hailed her cheerily and asked, "Lots of folks at the house now?" Halia merely nodded and hurried on. She could not understand why people talked so much, for she herself did not like to talk. It was so difficult to say the words. Most persons could not understand her, except for the village shop keepers who had known her since she was a child.

THE LITTLE TOWN of Marina del Oro was a cove not far south of Carmel on the Pacific Coast. One end had a wide, sandy beach and small fishing wharf and all of the village houses and shops were at this end; the other, nearest the Rhodes' isolated place, was rocky and dangerous. Halia's Aunt Rachel Rhodes, left with a rambling old home and many debts, had done very well for herself. Her establishment became a small, exclusive refuge for the wealthy, jaded people who badly needed nest and renovating after a year of heavy work and social activities. Rachel Rhodes made no concession to their customary luxuries.

Her rooms held only necessities, but they were large and immaculate and each had a balcony or big window from which to look upon the sea. Her rates were high and her cook was a genius.

The two cypresses that stood before the house on the bluff were casting long shadows when Halia went slipping and sliding in her hurry down the dirt and rock path of the cliff, down to the sea. Wild and desolate stretched the beach, every rock tormented into grotesque shape by the heavy breakers, the sand dotted with driftwood like limbs torn from living bodies. Only the small boat, belonging to the Rhodes place gave sign of human habitation; it was pulled far back against the cliff.

Beyond the breakers the Rock jutted high above a lower, more level cluster of rocks that pierced the sea, projecting out from the shore and invisible except at very low tide. Halia went to the edge of this reef and stood and laughed. The fisherman believed they knew the habits of the fish and the sea, but they did not know what she did. The men who came with strange machines and tanks and boats, who talked and wrote down words on paper, thought they knew. But they were wrong.

The sun died in the early fog mist and nothing moved along the cove and its waters, Halia liked it that way. *People smell*

queer, she thought, smell of what they are feeling: hate, or fear, or love. They are not clean.

SUDDENLY SHE heard the hoarse, sharp call and saw a dark shining head appear near the Rock. At once Halia called back, with the sound that was so easy for her to make. Then a great black body heaved itself out of the sea and hunched onto the ledge of the Rock. Halia began wading out over the jagged reef, her feet unhurt by the clusters of sharp mussels and barnacles. The sea rose to her armpits and she waved her arms above her head.

All the townsfolk warned children and strangers away from the maze of dangerous rocks at that end of the cove. Some said that a shark had been seen there, but others said that the water was much too cold for sharks, and too shallow.

Wading was too slow, Halia found; she went to the rim of the ledge, made a shallow dive and, her heart bursting with joy and love, swam to the big Rock. Again the harsh cry rang over the water as the gleaming black form bent toward the girl, and she climbed up and threw her arms around the neck of the young male sea lion.

On the little wharf a mile from the Rock a fisherman raised his head. "Guess Jonah's back. That was his bark." But it was too dark and too far away

to see the two figures that lay close together on the wet, slippery surface.

THE MAN CAME late to the house on the cliff that night and ate a sparse supper from the tray Rachel Rhodes had brought to his room. In his Chinese dressing-gown of ivory brocade with the rings flashing on his fingers as he turned a page of the rare erotic book, while he finished his meal, he was an outlandish figure in that time and place. Richard Warren sighed impatiently, ran a nervous hand through his hair — too black from the dye he used — and got up. He opened one of his traveling cases and looked at the bottles of liquor and the contraband cigarettes that lay there. He knew he must have a complete change of pace in his life if he were to remain healthy, and was determined to not use these supplies.

But living in the daytime instead of the night was not going to be easy, he knew, and found another book to distract him. This one, of ancient aracana, bored him after scanning a few pages; there was nothing new for him in the world. He had sampled every dangerous excitement, each ravishing delight. And he went to the old mottled mirror over the plain oaken dresser and removed his robe and examined his firm, lean body carefully. There was no

sagging flesh, no fat; every inch of the fine skin was sound. This fascinating body of his, which his mind had molded into an instrument of pleasure, had given and received much ecstasy. But he did not look at his face.

THE FOLLOWING morning Halia was propped up in bed, trying again to read her only book, one written for twelve-year-olds. From time to time she would reach into the tub at her bedside, swarming with small sea creatures, scoop up a handful and fill her mouth. Abruptly, the door of her room was shoved open, and Rachel Rhodes walked in. From the gray hair strained into a knot on the top of her head to the plain, serviceable black oxfords on her feet she was an austere, uncompromising person — a steel piston of a woman, efficient and unyielding.

"You'll have to take a breakfast tray to one of them," she snapped. "That fool Mattie just sprained her ankle."

Halia stared at her from the rumpled bedclothes. "You understand me, don't you?" asked her aunt contemptuously. "Get up and try to look presentable so you don't frighten anybody."

AFTER A sleepless night, Richard Warren stood tapping his foot impatiently while he waited for his breakfast tray. He heard an odd, scraping sound at

the door and opened it. For once in his life Richard was startled. That incredible face! Those enormous gray eyes!

"Break-fas'."

While she set down the tray and arranged the table by the glass doors overlooking the balcony and the sea, he saw that her body, under the cotton blouse and skirt, moved with amazing grace, each motion flowing into the next as if body, arm, and hand were one. And the breasts were large and full, the hips swelling, the legs beautiful. Long hair, of a color impossible to determine, hung below her shoulders and her skin, extremely fine textured, had a faintly luminous quality. "Thank you Halia. We shall be friends, I hope. I shall be staying here for quite a while."

The girl merely nodded coldly and left.

Lying on the beach at night, wondering when Jonah would return, Halia began thinking about the tall, thin man upstairs. He was the first person to be kind to her, to beg her to bring his mail and his breakfast to him. He wanted only her, Halia, to attend him and he did not mind her not talking. He liked to look at her, she knew, smiling that wonderful smile of his, sometimes touching her hair. Everyone else laughed at the 'molasses' hair, as they called it, but Richard found it interesting

He has a good smell, she

thought; it is a mixture of many things. Things I don't know about. But there is no feeling in his smell, like the other people have. And his eyes are open at night and his mind is going at night. In the darkness, almost as if he were under the water, moving through the sea. Then her naked body turned restlessly in the cool mist on the beach. His face has deep wrinkles like scars burnt into the skin. Why doesn't his face match his body? In swimming trunks he is a young man until he turns his head. And why does he keep talking to me and meeting me when I am working in the back of the house and yard. He is one of the guests and they are different from anyone else in the village and from anyone I have known. And all of them different from me.

When Halia got up and pulled the purple frock over her head and climbed the cliff path she stopped under his balcony and looked up. His light was on; he, too could not sleep but wanted to be active at night, as she did. There was sharp pain now in the big nipples of her breasts and she touched them to try and make the pain stop. Human beings had always been cold and mocking. Richard, sooner or later, would be the same as the rest. Why should she turn back now from the way she had chosen — the only way for her — simply because of a guest who would go away and never be

seen again? No, she would not turn back. Still gazing upward, the girl pressed both hands hard against the heavy breasts aching with desire at the thought of the man behind the yellow light. If one, only one, would accept her.

ONE MORNING Richard had carried his skin diving equipment to the back of the house when Adams came by with the mail.

"Going to dive down near the Rock?"

"Yes."

"Can be nasty down there."

"Halia is going with me."

The postman stared at him in surprise. "Oh, well, in that case . . . She knows every inch of the Cove."

It seemed to Richard that all of his wiles were useless with this strange girl. He found himself as challenged, as excited as he had been when he first made love. "A sweet girl. And lonely, poor child . . . I suppose you knew her mother and father?"

"Met her mother a few times." He continued sorting the mail. "Lived in a little shack over yonder. Shack's gone. So's Halia's mother. She left here when the girl was a year old. Her sister, Mrs. Rhodes, took care of Halia ever since. The mother never came back."

"But the father . . .?"

"Nobody ever saw him. Musta been some traveling man who

stopped over one night. Or a bum." He scratched his head thoughtfully. "They do tell that just after Halia was born a guy came to town, had a few beers at the tavern, and asked for Halia's mother. Then he went off to the shack — and nobody ever saw *him* again, either. But . . ." Adams lowered his voice, "Halia's mother was a wild one."

GREEN, LUMINOUS glassy water closed over Richard and Halia as they went gliding down and along among the rocks, where abalone clung and some lobster could be glimpsed. Masses of seaweed and grasses waved gently as they went through and Halia, turning, twisting, darting, circling, had never been so happy except with Jonah. Richard, who prided himself upon his skill at this as in all sports was astounded at the girl. After a half hour, he knew she could stay under water for twelve to fifteen minutes — longer than any South Pacific native who was forced to carry a heavy rock to take him down.

Once, when she had disappeared Richard saw a cave and thought she might have gone into it. Going closer, he grabbed a projecting rock and held on. In the narrow, shallow cave sprawled out, weighted by a heavy, rusted bars and an old boat anchor, was a skeleton. A man's — yet it did not look altogether like a man's skeleton.

As he swam into the cave he looked into Halia's eyes. Behind the glass mask they were two burning furies, and in her right hand was a long, gleaming knife.

Raging, she pushed at him, jerking her head back in the direction from which they had come, and shaking the knife threateningly. He did as she wanted.

When they were back on shore he said, in his throaty, crooning voice, "It isn't hospitable to threaten a friend with a knife."

Halia, shaking out her long, straight hair, felt a terrible constriction in her chest and throat and struggled for breath. Richard was the only person who had not stared at her cruelly, who had tried to understand her — and she had pulled her long knife on him! At last she choked out, "The cave. No one knows. No one goes. There is a sacred place. My father — buried."

A slow smile spread across Richard's brown, wrinkled face. Here was the rarity, the new mystery to titillate his jaded spirit. This fish-eyed girl with her father's skeleton tied to a rusty anchor.

Reluctantly Halia continued. "A letter. Left for me. I grew up and read what my mother wrote down. About my father."

"But why *there*?"

Halia shrugged. "Don't know."

Did it matter where the dead lay? But she moved uneasily in the hot rays of the sun at which she could not look, while Richard flung himself upon the sand and sighed contentedly under the warm golden bath.

"Please." Impulsively she put her hand on his leg. "Sorry about knife." The bright blade was hidden once more in the sheath that fitted neatly on her thigh.

He took both her hands in his and gently kissed them. "Poor child," he said, and she felt her eyes sting a little. What was it, she wondered, making her eyes sting?

THAT EVENING Richard set out glasses, brandy and delicate morsels that he had brought from the city's finest gourmet shops. When he heard pebbles rattling and the sound of something sliding down the steep cliff path he went to the balcony. Halia, carrying a large sack on her back, was going down the path. Puzzled, Richard looked back at the table and the wood ready to light in the fireplace. He was certain that she would come to him that night.

Only a half disk of silver, brilliant in its newness hung in the sky above the great sea as Halia made her way across the beach. Here she pulled off the purple dress, took up the heavy sack and went naked into the water. Comforting, soothing

liquid close round her, flowed round her as she went out to the ebony mass of the Rock where Jonah was waiting. She climbed up and from the sack took the large fish she had brought him. He barked once in appreciation and swallowed the food. But Halia turned her head, sharp eyes on the black swell, touched palely by the moon. Someone was coming. Another friend. She made Jonah understand this and he came close to rub his head and neck along her wet body in affection.

Out of the hissing sea reared the white jaws of the shark, wide open, avid, demanding. The girl waved her arm and the shark's jaws shut and he whirled about gracefully, swirling the water, making a gracious greeting in his own fashion. Then the hideous head lifted above the surface once more. Her hands were already holding the huge, bloody piece of meat from the sack; she threw it to him. Two long rows of savage teeth closed over the meat.

Richard, dividing his time between watching the orange-crimson fire flames and the balcony, from which he looked out uneasily, felt there was something unusual abroad that night. The half moon had been hidden by a wet gray fog moving in fast from the open sea and the beach and the Rock were concealed as if neither had existed.

And the girl — had she, too, vanished?

THE SCRAPING at his bedroom door sounded and his smile was triumphant as he went to open it. Noiselessly, swiftly Halia slipped into the room. As she moved about, staring curiously at the things on the table, she left puddles of salty water and bits of limp seaweed from her bare feet.

"My dear — you must be quite wet!" He saw the dress clinging to her. "Take this drink before you catch cold."

Halia slowly sipped the very strong brandy and soda and gazed at him with her stiff, awkward smile. "Happy. Here. In your room."

In a little while she stripped off her dress and entered his bed as if it were a long sought home. There in the sanctuary of acceptance by him, her passion surged and swelled in a torrent of violent, savage love, so pure, so direct that Richard almost became a man again. For each had reached the same point in existence, traveling from opposite roads; he, the ultra-sophisticate had, in his search for all human delights, deliberately debased his body and spirit, while the girl was now desperately struggling to lift herself above the creature world.

When she left him, he chuckled with delight, for he meant to fit this treasure into his life,

somehow. But he wondered at the reek of fish that permeated the whole room . . .

They met only in the secret night, shrouded in darkness and sea mist, sometimes in his room, sometimes on the beach, and he made his kind of love to her. Once, on the beach a shapeless mass, like the sea mist itself thickening and assuming an indescribable form, rose up on top of the Rock and sent scream after scream through the roar of the breakers. "What's that!" cried Richard. "See — over there!"

Halia laughed very softly. "Jonah. He doesn't like you with me. Your hands touch me."

"Nonsense, Halia. What wierd ideas you have."

The big globes of her eyes looked at him as out of a deep abyss. "Sea lion can feel. So can fish and other animal. People don't know. Animal and fish want to be friends. But people kill or put in a zoo. Some day people will be in cages."

A chill went through him and his flesh tingled as if maggots were crawling in it. He got up saying brusquely, "I'm going back before I freeze with the cold and become ill."

She followed, wondering again over the meaning of the words 'cold' and 'ill' for she had never experienced either. There were so many things to learn. Moving to Richard's side she rubbed her head against his

shoulder up and down, to make him notice her and when his voice, now in that subtle croon came to her she felt the deepest chord within her touched. It was the signal to pull away from the kindly friends she knew. As she considered that agonizing effort, the bitter pain, the awful confusion of mind, and the rending away of many instincts natural to her that she would be forced to undergo, Halia shuddered. But when Richard told her his plan she consented without the slightest hesitation.

A FEW DAYS later Halia, alone in her room, was gazing sadly at the large tub, now empty. The room looked very strange with the cheap old suitcase, stolen from the attic lying on her bed. In it were the new clothes Richard had insisted on her buying with the money he gave her. Clothes like the narrow white linen dress she was wearing, with the blue silk coat and the stockings and white, high-heeled shoes that were so difficult to walk in.

Passing a hand over her greenish bronze hair, she made sure the big knot at the back of her head was tight with the metal pins and the combs. The old way was better because long hair concealed the parts of her neck which must be covered. But Richard had asked that she make the change.

She went over to the house

to seek him in his room for reassurance, but found him gone. With her usual silent movements and noiseless tread Halia went looking for him. Approaching the combination reading and music room she heard the sound of his voice, which came to her with clearness and volume unknown to other people. *Always his voice will pull me to him*, she thought, and was glad. *All the strange words of his love, his command will draw me and teach me*. Halia paused where she was. She had never been able to understand the meaning of all the words he had used but she knew, with that uncanny, primitive sense of hers, the 'feeling' of the words.

Richard was saying, "Of course it's a startling idea."

A woman's voice murmured. Halia remembered the new guest with the queer silvery hair and many brilliant green stones in her rings and bracelets who had arrived that morning. "But I made a point to look at this girl. She's wild — probably unmanageable. And ugly, Dick! Very ugly!"

"Naturally, she's ugly, Angela darling. She's a true original. An exotic. I'm going to transplant her into my home in the city as a conversation piece. Think what a marvelous contrast she'll be to my ivory Chinese figurines, my porcelains, my contour furniture."

"You talk as if she were not human."

Halia's breath drew in sharply, the pain knifing her chest.

"Actually Halia is not human. A sort of hominid. A subhuman. Imagine her at one of my parties!" he laughed.

"Always busy with your life work, aren't you, Dick? Always corrupting."

"My dear, I refuse to be bored."

"And when you're tired of the girl, what will happen to her?"

Richard sighed, rather impatiently. "What happened to all the other young men and women?"

HALIA LISTENED for the woman's answer, but none came. As silently as a snake slipping over the ground Halia moved through the halls and rooms, into the back garden to the shed. Eyes shut, fists clenched, she waited for her body to cease trembling. *If only I knew what all the words meant*, she thought. *How can I be certain that he is good or evil? How? 'Girl is ugly.'* she remembered clearly. Richard had said it. 'Halia is not human.' Yet she had meant to try so desperately hard. Other words from Richard's mouth had come with cold, sneering laughter underneath; with some evil, lacerating intention toward herself. Danger of a kind she could not understand was in Richard's tone and in the scent of him.

Scent of the hunter. All her uncanny animal instincts rose to tell her of danger, and they never lied.

In her infinite loneliness, caught halfway between animal and human, the girl remembered. *The people in the village hurt me a little. But not as Richard is doing. The fisherman puts bait on a hook. The hunter sets a trap. Richard has done this.*

THAT NIGHT, barefoot, wearing the old violet frock she led Richard down the steep cliff path. It was very dark but the sea fog lay off the land, touching the shore side of the Rock and concealing it.

"We were ready to leave today, but you had to stay over to come down to the beach one more time," he grumbled.

She pointed. "Friends. Want to say goodbye. Here."

They arrived at the reef and the tide was out. Richard stared curiously at the girl. In spite of the darkness, her skin glowed as if bathed in phosphorescence. Also, he was conscious, as never before of the presence of unseen, living creatures all around him. Piles of slippery kelp lay humped on the sand and along the reef that projected out into the water and ended in the great Rock itself. Softly the water hissed, promising the sea, the ports of call far off, the coral shores, the jungle grasses

"You've seen it now. You've said goodbye."

But the salt-rough hand that held his tightened and Halia went forward over the sharp reef, over the clusters of mussels. "Please. Come." Among the gray, pitted rocks furred with sea anemone, bristling with molluscs there was great warfare going on. She smiled, thinking of it. The small, almost microscopic creatures were being chased and killed by the larger. A starfish crawled along, looking for prey. A giant slug withdrew into his shell. A hermit crab was hiding against an enemy attack. The battlefield was all around them and beneath their feet and this was as it should be, she knew.

Suddenly a loud splash sounded on Richard's right, but he could see nothing. He jerked back. "We needn't go on!"

"Come."

Something was moving on the ledge of the great Rock directly in front of the. "Halia!"

For the first time she turned to look at her enemy and the gray eyes pierced his and the smile was a flash of white silver. "Do not fear, Richard. You love me. You say it many times. How can you feel fear when you are with the one you love?"

He looked back across the beach which now seemed so far away and up past the night tangled cypresses, old sad witches leaning on a wind long

gone, to the yellow light that shone from the windows of the house. But she tugged harder at his hand and now the water was knee deep. He stumbled and fell on the sharp rocks. "Not so fast. I can't see!"

Halia pulled him to his feet. "How funny that you can't. I can. All of us out here can see."

Releasing his hand suddenly she squirmed up onto the Rock with a single, graceful motion of her entire body. She looked down at him through the long strands of hair. Richard knew what the hair looked like, now. Seaweed. "I'm not going up there," he stated firmly.

THROWING BACK her head, Halia's breast heaved and her throat quivered as she gave a high, eery, very faint cry. A few seconds later there came a great swirling of water on one side of the Rock. The water moved oddly, not foaming, but circling, tossing wavelets against the Rock.

"There's something under the water!" he shouted in alarm.

"Nothing, Richard. Come."

The Rock seemed safer so he climbed awkwardly onto the ledge and found himself shaking. Halia gazed closely at her beloved as she drew the knife from its sheath.

"Back — we're going back!" he cried angrily, fighting the terrible, nameless fear.

"One of us," she murmured,

and plunged the knife into first one of his legs, then into the other with short, shallow cuts.

"Crazy — you're crazy!" Richard lunged at her and clutched the wriggling body of the girl, but he could not hold her.

It was easy for Halia to push him from the Rock into the sea. The jaws of the great white fish were waiting, eager for flesh, the rows of razor teeth gleaming. Halia watched the shark tear off the man's legs. Then, throwing back her head she gave another of the wild, soundless cries and the shark, thrashing his tail, grinned up at her and waited.

Sliding down into the water, she effortlessly brought what was left of Richard up onto the reef where there was one small area above the surface. There she left the bleeding lump of human flesh and turned back to the Rock.

Jonah was waiting . . .

When the surgeon at the hospital had finished his work and stated that Richard would live, Derek, the village policeman who had found him, took another stiff peg of whiskey. The platinum haired woman, Richard's friend murmured, "Crippled for life. Half a man. That body he was so proud of."

"Hell — he wouldn't even be alive if I hadn't gone down there to look fer them fellows tryin' to steal Miz Rhodes' boat!" "Halia told me t'day she seen

'em down there last night an' scared 'em away. But she made me promise to take a look around tonight 'bout nine o'clock, she said.

"Where is Halia?"

Derek shook his head sadly. "All we found was this." He held up the salt-soaked purple frock of coarse cloth. It looked like an old unwanted skin that had been discarded.



Our continuing gratitude to you, the readers, who have taken the trouble to write to us not only listing stories in order of preference for the current issue, and letting us know any you disliked, but offering substantial lists of nominations for reprint in future issues. While there is a considerable amount of overlap on these lists, this does not discourage us in the least; we are still delighted at the variety you are suggesting.

At last tabulation, H. P. Lovecraft was far and away the most-wanted author, and we're happy to offer you one of his less-frequently reprinted tales in this issue. However, other readers have seconded Mr. James Daley, who did not want any HPL at all, to the extent of begging us not to concentrate either on this author or his type of story — which seems to be wise counsel. You will see more Lovecraft, but not in each and every issue.

Next to HPL, one of the most frequently asked-for authors has been one of your editor's oldtime favorites, The Rev. Henry S. Whitehead. My thanks to the many of you who nominated "Cassius"; I can only single out the first person to suggest this story, and you'll see him credited in the blurb for that story, next time. With the present Lovecraft tale, I cannot honorably award any prize since specific nominations for this story came in after arrangements were made to reprint it.

We shall, however, offer one more running prize to readers who send us their preferences. Any (and all) readers whose lists contain the top five stories in an issue, in the order in which the consensus places them, will receive a complimentary copy of the next issue, or a one-issue extension to their subscription. Needless to say, such entries must be received before the consensus is published.

What Was It?

by Fitz-James O'Brien

Fitz-James O'Brien, who is the subject of chapter four of Sam Moskowitz's fine book, **Explorers Of The Infinite** (World, 1963) died in 1862 from wounds received while fighting in the Union army. Lieutenant O'Brien, thirty-three, had made outstanding contributions to the development of the short story on the American scene. Moskowitz notes that O'Brien was born in Ireland in 1828, and that his stories and poems were published in Irish, Scottish, and British magazines during his youth. After running through a sizeable inheritance in record time, the commentator tells us, "Following an unsuccessful attempt to run off with the wife of an English officer, he (O'Brien) fled to the United States. He arrived in December 1852, and within a few short months succeeded in placing poems and stories in several American publications." A most welcome refugee, indeed! **What Was It?** preceded two other classic tales dealing with the same theme: **The Horla**, by Guy de Maupassant, and **The Damned Thing**, by Ambrose Bierce. There has been debate as to which of the three stories is the best, we are on the side of those who nominate the first as superior of its kind. An interesting sidelight in this tale, as in other fiction and writing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is the fact that the use of opium (usually referred to as laudanum, tincture of opium, but a term applicable in those times to any preparation in which opium was the chief ingredient) is not regarded as any more reprehensible than the use of whisky, unless indulged to excess.

IT IS, I CONFESS, with considerable diffidence that I approach the strange narrative which I am about to relate. The events which I purpose detailing are of so extraordinary a character that I am quite prepared to meet with an unusual amount of incredulity and scorn. I accept all such beforehand. I have, I trust, the literary courage to face unbelief. I have, after mature consideration, resolved to narrate, in as simple and straightforward a manner as I can compass, some facts that passed under my observation, in the month of July last, and which, in the annals of the mysteries of physical science, are wholly unparalleled.

I live at number — Twenty-sixth Street, in New York. The house is in some respects a curious one. It has enjoyed for the last two years the reputation of being haunted. It is a large and stately residence, surrounded by what was once a garden, but which is now only a green enclosure used for bleaching clothes. The dry basin of what has been a fountain, and a few fruit trees ragged and unpruned, indicate that this spot in past days was a pleasant, shady retreat, filled with fruits and flowers and the sweet murmur of waters.

The house is very spacious. A hall of noble size leads to a large spiral staircase winding through its center, while the

various apartments are of imposing dimensions. It was built some fifteen or twenty years since by Mr. A. —, the well-known New York merchant, who five years ago threw the commercial world into convulsions by a stupendous bank fraud. Mr. A. —, as everyone knows, escaped to Europe, and died not long after, of a broken heart. Almost immediately after the news of his decease reached this country and was verified, the report spread in Twenty-sixth Street that number — was haunted. Legal measures had dispossessed the widow of its former owner, and it was inhabited merely by a caretaker and his wife, placed there by the house agent into whose hands it had passed for purposes of renting or sale.

These people declared that they were troubled with unnatural noises. Doors were opened without any visible agency. The remnants of furniture scattered through the various rooms were, during the night, piled one upon the other by unknown hands. Invisible feet passed up and down the stairs in broad daylight, accompanied by the rustle of unseen silk dresses, and the gliding of viewless hands along the massive balusters. The caretaker and his wife declared they would live there no longer. The house agent laughed, dismissed them, and put others in their place. The noises

and supernatural manifestations continued. The neighborhood caught up the story, and the house remained untenanted for three years. Several persons negotiated for it; but, somehow, always before the bargain was closed they heard the unpleasant rumours and declined to treat any further.

It was in this state of things that my landlady, who at that time kept a boarding-house in Bleeker Street, and who wished to move farther up town, conceived the bold idea of renting number — Twenty-sixth Street. Happening to have in her house rather a plucky and philosophical set of boarders, she laid her scheme before us, stating candidly everything she had heard respecting the ghostly qualities of the establishment to which she wished to remove us. With the exception of two timid persons — a sea-captain and a returned Californian, who immediately gave notice that they would leave — all of Mrs. Mof-fat's guests declared that they would accompany her in her chivalric incursion into the abode of spirits.

Our removal was effected in the month of May, and we were charmed with our new residence. The portion of Twenty-sixth Street where our house is situated, between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, is one of the pleasantest localities in New York. The gardens back of the

houses, running down nearly to the Hudson, form, in the summer time, a perfect avenue of verdure. The air is pure and invigorating, sweeping, as it does, straight across the river from the Weehawken heights, and even the ragged garden which surrounded the house, although displaying on washing days rather too much clothes-line, still gave us a piece of green-sward to look at, and a cool retreat in the summer evenings, where we smoked our cigars in the dusk, and watched the fireflies flashing their dark lanterns in the long grass.

OF COURSE WE had no sooner established ourselves at number — than we began to expect the ghosts. We absolutely awaited their advent with eagerness. Our dinner conversation was supernatural. One of the boarders, who had purchased Mrs. Crowe's *Night Side of Nature* for his own private delectation, was regarded as a public enemy by the entire household for not having bought twenty copies. The man led a life of supreme wretchedness while he was reading this volume. A system of espionage was established, of which he was the victim. If he incautiously laid the book down for an instant and left the room, it was immediately seized and read aloud in secret places to a select few. I found myself a person of immense im-

portance, it having leaked out that I was tolerably well versed in the history of supernaturalism, and had once written a story the foundation of which was a ghost. If a table or a wainscot panel happened to warp when we were assembled in the large drawing-room, there was an instant silence, and every one was prepared for an immediate clanking of chains and a spectral form.

After a month of psychological excitement, it was with the utmost dissatisfaction that we were forced to acknowledge that nothing in the remotest degree approaching the supernatural had manifested itself. Once the butler asseverated that his candle had been blown out by some invisible agency while he was undressing himself for the night; but as I had more than once discovered this gentleman in a condition when one candle must have appeared to him like two, I thought it possible that, by going a step farther in his potations, he might have reversed this phenomenon, and seen no candle at all where he ought to have beheld one.

Things were in this state when an incident took place so awful and inexplicable in its character that my reason fairly reels at the bare memory of the occurrence. It was the tenth of July. After dinner was over I repaired, with my friend Dr. Hammond, to the garden to smoke my evening

pipe. Independent of certain mental sympathies which existed between the doctor and myself, we were linked together by a vice. We both smoked opium. We knew each other's secret, and respected it. We enjoyed together that wonderful expansion of thought, that marvellous intensifying of the perceptive faculties, that boundless feeling of existence when we seem to have points of contact with the whole universe — in short, that unimaginable spiritual bliss, which I would not surrender for a throne, and which I hope you, reader, will never — never taste.

THOSE HOURS OF opium happiness which the doctor and I spent together in secret were regulated with a scientific accuracy. We did not blindly smoke the drug of paradise, and leave our dreams to chance. While smoking, we carefully steered our conversation through the brightest and calmest channels of thought. We talked of the East, and endeavored to recall the magical panorama of its glowing scenery. We criticized the most sensuous poets — those who painted life ruddy with health, brimming with passion, happy in the possession of youth and strength and beauty. If we talked of Shakespeare's 'Tempest', we lingered over Ariel, and avoided Caliban. Like the Guebers, we turned our faces to the

east, and saw only the sunny side of the world.

The skilful coloring of our train of thought produced in our subsequent visions a corresponding tone. The splendors of Arabian fairyland dyed our dreams. We paced that narrow strip of grass with the tread and port of kings. The songs of the *rana arborea*, while he clung to the bark of the ragged plum tree, sounded like the strains of divine musicians. Houses, walls, and streets melted like rain clouds, and vistas of unimaginable glory stretched away before us. It was a rapturous companionship. We enjoyed the vast delight more perfectly because, even in our most ecstatic moments, we were conscious of each other's presence. Our pleasures, while individual, were still twin, vibrating and moving in musical accord.

On the evening in question, the tenth of July, the doctor and myself drifted into an unusually metaphysical mood. We lit our large meerschaums, filled with fine Turkish tobacco, in the core of which burned a little black nut of opium, that, like the nut in the fairy tale, held within its narrow limits wonders beyond the reach of kings; we paced to and fro, conversing. A strange perversity dominated the currents of our thought. They would *not* flow through the sun-lit channels into which we strove to divert them. For some unac-

countable reason, they constantly diverged into dark and lonesome beds, where a continual gloom brooded. It was in vain that, after our old fashion, we flung ourselves on the shores of the East, and talked of its gay bazaars, of the splendors of the time of Haroun, of harems and golden palaces. Black afreets continually arose from the depths of our talk, and expanded, like the one the fisherman released from the copper vessel, until they blotted everything bright from our vision. Insensibly, we yielded to the occult force that swayed us, and indulged in gloomy speculation. We had talked some time upon the proneness of the human mind to mysticism, and the almost universal love of the terrible, when Hammond suddenly said to me, "What do you consider to be the greatest element of terror?"

THE QUESTION puzzled me. That many things were terrible, I knew. Stumbling over a corpse in the dark; beholding, as I once did, a woman floating down a deep and rapid river, with wildly lifted arms, and awful, upturned face, uttering, as she drifted, shrieks that rent one's heart, while we, the spectators, stood frozen at a window which overhung the river at a height of sixty feet, unable to make the slightest effort to save her, but dumbly watching her last supreme agony and her dis-

appearance. A shattered wreck, with no life visible, encountered floating listlessly on the ocean, is a terrible object, for it suggests a huge terror, the proportions of which are veiled. But it now struck me, for the first time, that there must be one great and ruling embodiment of fear — a King of Terrors, to which all others must succumb. What might it be? To what chain of circumstances would it owe its existence?

"I confess, Hammond," I replied to my friend, "I never considered the subject before. That there must be one Something more terrible than any other thing, I feel. I cannot attempt, however, even the most vague definition."

"I am somewhat like you, Harry," he answered. "I feel my capacity to experience a terror greater than anything yet conceived by the human mind — something combining in fearful and unnatural amalgamation of hitherto supposed incompatible elements. The calling of the voices in Brockden Brown's novel of *Wieland* is awful; so is the picture of the Dweller of the Threshold, in Bulwer's *Zanoni*; but," he added; shaking his head gloomily, "there is something more horrible still than these."

"Look here, Hammond," I rejoined, "let us drop this kind of talk, for heaven's sake! We shall suffer for it, depend on it."

"I don't know what's the matter with me tonight," he replied, "but my brain is running upon all sort of weird and awful thoughts. I feel as if I could write a story like Hoffman, tonight, if I were only master of literary style."

"Well, if we are going to be Hoffmanesque in our talk, I'm off to bed. Opium and nightmares should never be brought together. How sultry it is! Good night, Hammond."

"Good night, Harry. Pleasant dreams to you."

"To you, gloomy wretch, affrights, ghouls, and enchanters."

WE PARTED and each sought his respective chamber. I undressed quickly and got into bed, taking with me, according to my usual custom, a book, over which I generally read myself to sleep. I opened the volume as soon as I laid my head upon the pillow, and instantly flung it to the other side of the room. It was Goudon's *History of Monsters*, a curious French work, which I had lately imported from Paris, but which, in the state of mind I had then reached was anything but an agreeable companion. I resolved to go to sleep at once; so, turning down my gas until nothing but a little blue point of light glimmered on the top of the tube, I composed myself to rest.

The room was in total dark-

ness. The atom of gas that still remained alight did not illuminate a distance of three inches round the burner. I desperately drew my arm across my eyes, as if to shut out even the darkness, and tried to think of nothing. It was in vain. The confounded themes touched on by Hammond in the garden kept obtruding themselves on my brain. I battled against them. I erected ramparts of would-be blankness of intellect to keep them out. They still crowded upon me. While I was lying still as a corpse, hoping that by a perfect physical inaction I should hasten mental repose, an awful incident occurred. A Something dropped, as it seemed, from the ceiling, plump upon my chest, and the next instant I felt two bony hands encircling my throat, endeavoring to choke me.

I am no coward, and am possessed of considerable physical strength. The suddenness of the attack, instead of stunning me, strung every nerve to its highest tension. My body acted from instinct, before my brain had time to realize the terrors of my position. In an instant I wound two muscular arms around the creature, and squeezed it, with all the strength of despair, against my chest. In a few seconds the bony hands had fastened on my throat loosened their hold, and I was free to breathe once more. Then commenced a struggle of awful

intensity. Immersed in the most profound darkness, totally ignorant of the nature of the Thing by which I was so suddenly attacked, finding my grasp slipping every moment, by reason, it seemed to me, of the entire nakedness of my assailant, bitten with sharp teeth in the shoulder, neck, and chest, having every moment to protect my throat against a pair of sinewy, agile hands, which my utmost efforts could not confine — these were a combination of circumstances to combat which required all the strength, skill, and courage that I possessed.

At last, after a silent, deadly exhausting struggle, I got my assailant under by a series of incredible efforts of strength. Once pinned with my knee on what I made out to be its chest, I knew that I was victor. I rested for a moment to breathe. I heard the creature beneath me panting in the darkness, and felt the violent throbbing of a heart. It was apparently as exhausted as I was; that was one comfort. At this moment I remembered that I usually placed under my pillow, before going to bed, a large yellow silk pocket handkerchief. I felt for it instantly; it was there. In a few seconds more I had, after a fashion, pinioned the creature's arms.

I NOW FELT tolerably secure. There was nothing more to be done but to turn on the gas,

and, having first seen what my midnight assailant was like, arouse the household. I will confess to being actuated by a certain pride in not giving the alarm before; I wished to make the capture alone and unaided.

Never losing my hold for an instant, I slipped from the bed to the floor, dragging my captive with me. I had but a few steps to make to reach the gas burner; these I made with the greatest caution, holding the creature in a grip like a vice. At last I got within arm's length of the tiny speck of blue light which told me where the gas burner lay. Quick as lightning I released my grasp with one hand and led on the full flood of light. Then I turned to look at my captive.

I cannot even attempt to give any definition of my sensations the instant after I turned on the gas. I suppose I must have shrieked with terror, for in less than a minute afterwards my room was crowded with the inmates of the house. I shudder now as I think of that awful moment. I *saw nothing!* Yes; I had one arm firmly clasped round a breathing, panting, corporal shape, my other hand gripped with all its strength a throat as warm, and apparently fleshly, as my own; and yet with this living substance in my grasp, with its body pressed against my own, and all in the bright glare of a large jet of gas, I ab-

solutely beheld nothing! Not even an outline — a vapor!

I do not, even at this hour, realize the situation in which I found myself. I cannot recall the astounding incident thoroughly. Imagination in vain tries to compass the awful paradox.

It breathed. I felt its warm breath upon my cheek. It struggled fiercely. It had hands. They clutched me. Its skin was smooth, like my own. There it lay, pressed close up against me, solid as stone — and yet utterly invisible!

I wonder that I did not faint or go mad on the instant. Some wonderful instinct must have sustained me; for, absolutely, in place of loosening my hold on the terrible Enigma, I seemed to gain an additional strength in my moment of horror, and tightened my grasp with such wonderful force that I felt the creature shivering with agony.

Just then Hammond entered my room at the head of the household. As soon as he beheld my face — which, I suppose, must have been an awful sight to look at — he hastened forward, crying. "Great heaven, Harry! what has happened?"

"Hammond! Hammond!" I cried, "come here. Oh, this is awful! I have been attacked in bed by something or other, which I have hold of; but I can't see it — I can't see it!"

HAMMOND, DOUBTLESS

struck by the unfeigned horror expressed in my countenance, made one or two steps forward with an anxious yet puzzled expression. A very audible titter burst from the remainder of my visitors. This suppressed laughter made me furious. To laugh at a human being in my position! It was the worst species of cruelty. Now, I can understand why the appearance of a man struggling violently, as it would seem, with an airy nothing, and calling for assistance against a vision, should have appeared ludicrous. Then, so great was my rage against the mocking crowd that had I the power I would have stricken them dead where they stood.

"Hammond! Hammond!" I cried again despairingly, "for God's sake come to me. I can hold the — the Thing but a short while longer. It is overpowering me. Help me! Help me!"

"Harry," whispered Hammond, approaching me, "you have been smoking too much opium."

"I swear to you, Hammond, that this is no vision," I answered, in the same low tone. "Don't you see how it shakes my whole frame with its struggles? If you don't believe me, convince yourself. Feel it — touch it."

Hammond advanced and laid his hand in the spot I indicated. A wild cry of horror burst from him. He had felt it!

In a moment he had discover-

ed somewhere in my room a long piece of cord, and was the next instant winding it and knotting it about the body of the unseen being that I clasped in my arms.

"Harry," he said in a hoarse, agitated voice, for, though he preserved his presense of mind, he was deeply moved, "Harry, it's all safe now. You may let go, old fellow, if you're tired. The Thing can't move."

I was utterly exhausted, and I gladly loosed my hold.

HAMMOND STOOD holding the ends of the cord that bound the Invisible, twisted round his hand, while before him, self-supporting as it were, he beheld a rope laced and interlaced, and stretching tightly around a vacant space. I never saw a man look so thoroughly stricken with awe. Nevertheless his face expressed all the courage and determination which I knew him to possess. His lips, although white, were set firmly, and one could perceive at a glance that, although stricken with fear, he was not daunted.

The confusion that ensued among the guests of the house who were witnesses of this extraordinary scene between Hammond and myself — who beheld the pantomime of binding this struggling Something — who beheld me almost sinking from physical exhaustion when my task of jailer was over — the

confusion and terror that took possession of the bystanders, when they saw all this, was beyond description. The weaker ones fled from the apartment. The few who remained clustered near the door and could not be induced to approach Hammond and his Charge. Still incredulity broke out through their terror. They had not the courage to satisfy themselves, and yet they doubted. It was in vain that I begged of some of the men to come near and convince themselves by touch of the existence in that room of a living being which was invisible. They were incredulous but did not dare to undeceive themselves. How could a solid, living, breathing body be invisible, they asked. My reply was this. I gave a sign to Hammond, and both of us — conquering our fearful repugnance to touch the invisible creature — lifted it from the ground, manacled as it was, and took it to my bed. Its weight was about that of a boy of fourteen.

"Now, my friends," I said, as Hammond and myself held the creature suspended over the bed, "I can give you self-evident proof that here is a solid, ponderable body, which, nevertheless, you cannot see. Be good enough to watch the surface of the bed attentively."

I was astonished at my own courage in treating this strange event so calmly; but I had re-

covered from my first terror, and felt a sort of scientific pride in the affair, which dominated every other feeling.

The eyes of the bystanders were immediately fixed on my bed. At a given signal Hammond and I let the creature, fall. There was the dull sound of a heavy body alighting on a soft mass. The timbers of the bed creaked. A deep impression marked itself distinctly on the pillow, and on the bed itself. The crowd who witnessed this gave a low cry, and rushed from the room. Hammond and I were left alone with our Mystery.

WE REMAINED silent for some time, listening to the low, irregular breathing of the creature on the bed, and watching the rustle of the bedclothes as it impotently struggled to free itself from confinement. Then Hammond spoke.

"Harry, this is awful."

"Ay, awful."

"But not unaccountable."

"Not unaccountable! What do you mean? Such a thing has never occurred since the birth of the world. I know not what to think, Hammond. God grant that I am not mad, and that this is not an insane fantasy!"

"Let us reason a little, Harry. Here is a solid body which we touch, but which we cannot see. The fact is so unusual that it strikes us with terror. Is there no parallel, though, for such a

phenomenon? Take a piece of pure glass. It is tangible and transparent. A certain chemical coarseness is all that prevents its being so entirely transparent as to be totally invisible. It is not *theoretically impossible*, mind you, to make a glass which shall not reflect a single ray of light — a glass so pure and homogeneous in its atoms that the rays from the sun will pass through it as they do through the air, refracted but not reflected. We do not see the air, and yet we feel it."

"That's all very well, Hammond, but these are inanimate substances. Glass does not breathe, air does not breathe. *This* thing has a heart that palpitates — a will that moves it — lungs that play and inspire and respire."

"You forget the phenomena of which we have so often heard of late," answered the Doctor, gravely. "At the meetings called 'spirit circles', invisible hands have been thrust into the hands of those persons round the table — warm, fleshy hands that seemed to pulsate with mortal life."

"What? Do you think, then, that this thing is . . ."

"I don't know what it is," was the solemn reply; "but please the gods I will, with your assistance thoroughly investigate it."

We watched together, smoking many pipes, all night long, by the bedside of the unearthly being that tossed and panted

until it was apparently wearied out. Then we learned by the low, regular breathing that it slept.

THE NEXT MORNING the house was all astir. The boarders congregated on the landing outside my room, and Hammond and myself were lions. We had to answer a thousand questions as to the state of our extraordinary prisoner, for as yet not one person in the house except ourselves could be induced to set foot in the apartment.

The creature was awake. This was evidenced by the convulsive manner in which the bedclothes were moved in its efforts to escape. There was something truly terrible in beholding, as it were, those second-hand indications of the terrible writhings and agonized struggles for liberty which themselves were invisible.

Hammond and myself had racked our brains during the long night to discover some means by which we might realize the shape and general appearance of the Enigma. As well as we could make out by passing our hands over the creature's form, its outlines and lineaments were human. There was a mouth; a round, smooth head without hair; a nose, which, however, was little elevated above the cheeks; and its hands and feet felt like those of a boy. At first we thought of placing

the being on a smooth surface and tracing its outline with chalk, as shoemakers trace the outline of the foot. This plan was given up as being of no value. Such an outline would give not the slightest idea of its conformation.

A happy thought struck me. We would take a cast of it in plaster of Paris. This would give us the solid figure, and satisfy all our wishes. But how to do it? The movements of the creature would disturb the setting of the plastic covering, and distort the mould. Another thought. Why not give it chloroform? It had respiratory organs — that was evident by its breathing. Once reduced to a state of insensibility, we could do with it what we would. Doctor X— was sent for; and after the worthy physician had recovered from the first shock of amazement he proceeded to administer the chloroform. In three minutes afterwards we were enabled to remove the fetters from the creature's body, and a modeller was busily engaged in covering the invisible form with the moist clay.

In five minutes more we had a mould, a mold, and before evening a rough facsimile of the Mystery. It was shaped like a man — distorted, uncouth, and horrible, but still a man. It was small, not over four feet and some inches in height, and its limbs revealed a muscular de-

velopment that was unparalleled. Its face surpassed in hideousness anything I had ever seen. Gustave Dore, or Callot, of Tony Johannot never conceived anything so horrible. There is a face in one of the latter's illustrations to *Un Voyage ou il vous plaira* which somewhat approaches the countenance of this creature, but does not equal it. It was the physiognomy of what I should fancy a ghoul might be. It looked as if it was capable of feeding on human flesh.

HAVING SATISFIED our curiosity, and bound everyone in the house to secrecy, it became a question what was to be done with our Enigma? It was impossible that we should keep such a horror in our house; it was equally impossible that such an awful being should be let loose upon the world. I confess that I would have gladly voted for the creature's destruction. But who would shoulder the responsibility? Who would undertake the execution of this horrible semblance of a human being? Day after day this question was deliberated gravely. The boarders all left the house. Mrs. Moffat was in despair, and threatened Hammond and myself with all sorts of legal penalties if we did not remove the Horror. Our answer was: "We will go if you like, but we decline taking this creature with

us. Remove it yourself if you please. It appeared in your house. On you the responsibility rests." To this there was, of course, no answer. Mrs. Moffat could not obtain for love or money a person who would even approach the Mystery.

The most singular part of the affair was that we were entirely ignorant of what the creature habitually fed on. Everything in the way of nutriment that we could think of was placed before it, but was never touched. It was awful to stand by, day after day, and see the clothes toss, and hear the hard breathing, and know that it was starving.

Ten, twelve days, a fortnight passed, and it still lived. The pulsations of the heart, however, were daily growing fainter, and had now nearly ceased. It was evident that the creature was

dying for want of sustenance. While this terrible life struggle was going on. I felt miserable, I could not sleep. Horrible as the creature was, it was pitiful to think of the pangs it was suffering.

At last it died. Hammond and I found it cold and stiff one morning in the bed. The heart had ceased to beat, the lungs to inspire. We hastened to bury it in the garden. It was a strange funeral, the dropping of that viewless corpse into the damp hole. The cast of its form I gave to Doctor X—, who keeps it in his museum in Tenth Street.

As I am on the eve of a long journey from which I may not return, I have drawn up this narrative of an event the most singular that has ever come to my knowledge.



Last Act: October

by Tigrina

"Tigrina" is a name which many science fiction enthusiasts who encountered the strange (and sometimes wonderful) world of amateur "fan" publishing used to see in various publications emanating from the Los Angeles area. Beyond this we can tell you nothing except that what we may have known at one time about "Tigrina" has escaped us. No matter: the point is really in the story below, which we trust will keep you in suspense until the end.

THE MOTLEY CROWD of villagers flocked about the town square like vultures, although if they had been accused of anticipating with sadistic pleasure the spectacle of a young girl being burned to death, they would have denied it vehemently. Despite a vaguely sensed, repressed excitement, they would have insisted that duty required that they be present at a meting out of justice.

A chill October wind rustled the autumn leaves along the rutted main thoroughfare, and caused the idle spectators to

shrug themselves deeper into their homespun woollens.

The center of attraction, a comely lass in her teens, clad only in a crude white shirt, shuddered too, as she strained against the bonds which held her securely to the stake.

Squire Pilkington, the self-styled "witch-finder," sat astride his fat bay mare, an expression of smug self-righteousness stamped upon his features. He had been responsible for bringing this sinful creature to justice.

Conscious of the imposing

figure that he made, and of the awe in which the townspeople held him, he called out, "Yea, and well might ye shiver, Meg Clayton, though methinks ye'll not shiver for long when the ravening flames cleanse the sin from your soul!" His remark, addressed for the benefit of the onlookers as well, brought vociferous, half-hysterical assents from the mob.

"Let's get on with the burning!" came a voice from the outskirts of the crowd, and the frenzied cry was echoed from hundreds of throats, "Yea, burn her, burn the witch!"

Although public executions of witches had occurred at larger towns quite a distance away, this was the first one for the little village of Bloomsbury, and it made the townspeople feel important. The fact that the accused was a beautiful young girl had attracted residents from adjacent towns for miles around to augment the already enormous crowd.

Righteous housewives glared indignantly at the alleged witch, and commented upon the bold indecency of the creature in appearing in such scant attire. It did not occur to them that the poor girl did not appear thus voluntarily; that no other garments had been furnished.

Wide-eyed children stared in wonder, or clutched at their

mother's voluminous skirts and peeped shyly out.

The menfolk evidenced a grim sort of satisfaction that justice was to be done, although a few secretly felt pity for the defenseless girl, but salved their consciences by persuading themselves to believe that it was the girl's enchanting witch-like loveliness which aroused in them this unworthy emotion.

Goggle-eyed youths, farther back in the crowd, craned their necks and jostled one another for a glimpse of this wicked beauty who had been tried and sentenced to die for the practicing of witchcraft.

Squire Pilkington himself dismounted from his horse and strode boldly across the square to ignite the fire. A breathless hush fell upon the crowd; the sighing wind was the only sound. Meg braced herself against the stake, icily calm, holding her head high.

Squire Pilkington's hand hesitated before the lighted taper reached the pile of rubble, twigs, and wood which comprised Meg Clayton's funeral pyre. "Do you repent, Meg Clayton?" he asked, in a voice loud enough for the villagers to hear. "If ye repent now, mercy may be shown you in the Other World."

Meg tossed her head, and her raven hair streamed in the wind. She looked over the crowd slowly and deliberately.

"No, I do not repent!" she replied. Then, she turned toward the Squire, her emerald eyes ablaze. "And you, Squire Pilkington, who bring me to my untimely end, mere fire will not stop me! To the Witches' Sabbath nine days hence I shall ride on the wings of the wind. When you hear my laughter above the shriek of the gale, then you will have cause to shudder! Ye may burn my corporeal body, but my spirit will survive through the ages, and enter into animate and inanimate things alike to wreak vengeance upon you and yours. Ye think the mere burning of one witch will prevent evil? The Devil will ever exert his influence upon the unsuspecting world in divers guises — clever inventions, and so-called improvements for humanity. How subtly shall I use these to my advantage, finally exterminating all of you, down to the last member of your clan! I curse you and your future generations! October shall bode ill for you and yours! I curse you in the Name of the Prince of Darkness!" Thus saying, she spat at the feet of the flustered, indignant Squire.

Without more ado, Squire Pilkington lit the fire. The blaze spread rapidly; a cloud of smoke enveloped the lovely girl, but was presently dispelled to disclose the slender witch writhing under the searing tor-

ture. An acrid odor of burning flesh assailed the nostrils of those present. The onlookers were silent, staring in morbid fascination, and the crackling of the flames, audible through the entire square, combined with the wailing wind and the intermittent whimpers of frightened children into a kind of elemental funeral dirge for Meg Clayton. The witch said not a word, but continued to writhe in silent, horrible convulsions, as her magnificent ebony tresses went up in a sheet of flame, and her soft, white flesh turned black. It took a long while to burn Meg Clayton, but at last nothing remained but a few charred pieces of flesh and ashes.

The crowd dispersed; the bold, shameless behavior of the witch (they would not term it bravery) and her angry death curse the subject of every tongue.

Nine days later — on All Hallows' Eve — Squire Pilkington died of a fatal kick from his fat bay mare, a singular occurrence, since his horse was known to be extremely gentle.

THE TELEPHONE downstairs in the parlor of Miss Simpkins' Residence for Refined Gentlewomen tinkled apathetically.

"Miss Pilkington! Miss Pilkington! Telephone!" a voice called shrilly, and presently

that worthy lady, fortyish and angular, hastened down the stairs to the summons.

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Cranston. I would be pleased to remain with your little boy next Thursday evening," Miss Pilkington affirmed. "You will send your car around for me as usual, you say? About seven-thirty? Yes, that will be fine. Thank you for calling."

Miss Pilkington carefully replaced the receiver and minced daintily upstairs to her plain, austere little room. Idly, she wondered whether she should have accepted that invitation to remain with the Cranstons' child while the parents were out for the evening.

Miss Hortense Pilkington was what some people term a "professional sitter"; that is, she stayed with children when their parents wished to go out for the evening. Of course, she could have done more profitable work of some sort, but she did not deem it altogether proper for ladies to be employed. "A woman's place is in the home" was her maxim, even though she was the last of her line and had never married and had a family of her own. But the meager insurance income left to her by her parents was not quite enough, even for Miss Pilkington's extremely plain mode of living, so to augment her income a trifle, she resorted to remaining with children oc-

casional evenings. Of course, she accepted appointments only with the best families.

Aside from the remunerative possibilities, Miss Pilkington consoled herself with the thought that in her unique position, she was afforded the chance of instilling "peace and good" into the hearts and minds of her little charges. She often read the children "stories with a moral," if they were old enough to understand. She deplored the youthful trend toward comic strips and cartoon-adventure magazines. Miss Pilkington was an ardent reformer, as all her predecessors had been, but unfortunately, like many "reformers," she was narrow-minded and intolerant. With her, reforming was an obsession.

She continued to wonder whether she should have accepted the Cranstons' offer for next Thursday night. She would not have if her budget had not been so sadly depleted. Next Thursday night was All Hallows' Eve! In fact, it was for that very reason that the Cranstons had desired her services, as they were attending a Hallowe'en party that evening.

IT WAS EIGHT o'clock, and Hortense Pilkington was safely ensconced in her chaste white bed. She always retired at eight if she was not caring for children. Mechanically, she picked

up the old family Bible. It was also her custom to read a chapter every evening before slumber overtook her.

She leafed through the yellowed pages until she came to an ancient handwritten record, which she had read many times before. It was an account of the witch burning at Bloomsbury those many years ago. Certain sentences and words seemed to stand out as if they were printed in crimson lettering, so indelibly were impressed upon her mind certain quoted fragments of Meg Clayton's curse: "*My spirit will enter into animate and inanimate things alike . . .*" "*. . . evil influence upon the unsuspecting world . . . clever inventions and improvements . . .*", and then the sentence, "*October shall bode ill for you and yours.*"

And indeed, it had seemed that most members of the Pilkington family had met with death or with unfortunate accidents during that month. Well, of course there was Great Uncle Jonathan, mused Miss Hortense. He had been an exception, and had passed on in early January. She did not forget, though, that his death had been due to a fall down the stairs, which had occurred during the month of October, and had left him a helpless paralytic.

She glanced through the records in the family Bible of some of the other unfortunate

"coincidences". There was her older sister, Agatha, who had inadvertently gotten in the path of an oncoming automobile one foggy October night; then her vain, silly Aunt Matilda, who bought a special kind of mascara during that month, and later went blind from the use of it; her grandfather, who was killed by an explosion from a water heater; and her cousin, who had fallen asleep and had been accidentally asphyxiated from a faulty gas furnace. All these accidents had occurred during October. Were these deaths the direct result of the evil of which Meg Clayton had spoken, loosed upon the world in the "guise of clever inventions and so-called improvements for humanity"?

And Miss Pilkington recalled that her great grandfather had been brutally slain by his best friend, who had unexpectedly gone berserk one Hallowe'en night. The man had had no motive for this deed, and had been sane enough before his crime, and seemed to be so afterwards, although he had, of course, been committed to an institution.

And finally, Miss Pilkington's own father, a missionary, had been killed (and it was reported, consumed!) by a supposedly converted cannibal chieftain on October 17th, while on a journey of peace and good will among the wilds of some far-

off jungle. Her mother had passed on quietly from the shock several days later.

True, all of the Pilkingtons had not met violent deaths during the month of October. Several had contracted illnesses of one sort or another during that month, which later proved fatal, and one had gone mad during October and lived out the remainder of his years in a sanatorium. But taking it into account, it was at once apparent that, curse or no curse, October seemed to be an extremely unfortunate month for the Pilkington family.

It was only natural that Miss Hortense Pilkington should have a terror of this particular month. In vain she told herself that she was un-Christian in being superstitious, but then there were always those records of deaths in the family Bible. She looked forward to the stroke of midnight on October thirty-first as eagerly as most people anticipate the midnight bells of December thirty-first; after twelve o'clock midnight on Hallowe'en she felt as if the curse were lifted for another year, and that she could be assured of a continued peaceful existence, at least until the following October.

It was no wonder that she hesitated in accepting the Cranston's proposal. Still, she thought, so far October had exercised no sinister influence

upon her; she had escaped any disastrous results heretofore, and she was in seemingly good health. Perhaps because she was the last of her family, and the line would no longer continue, she was to be spared. She knew deep within herself that this would not be so, however, if the curse actually carried any power; Meg Clayton had sworn to eradicate the family, down to its very last member.

But surely nothing could happen to her between the hours of seven-thirty and twelve midnight on the evening of October thirty-first; not if she exercised proper precautions. The Cranstons would send their automobile for her, and after that she would be safe and secure in the Cranston manor.

THURSDAY FINALLY arrived, and with it a cold drizzling rain, which lasted throughout the day. At six o'clock, Miss Pilkington had just settled down in the residence dining hall to a meal of vegetable salad, lentil soup, spinach, turnips, crumpets and jelly, and a cup of luke-warm weak tea (she was a strict vegetarian) when she was interrupted by a telephone call. The Cranstons had had motor trouble and would not be able to call for her. Could she, as a special favor, start out a little earlier in order to arrive by eight? As she knew from having been there so many

times previously, the Cranston domicile was only about ten blocks distant from her lodgings. Since there was no bus or other method of transportation she would have to walk there, a distance of a mile or so, but of course the Cranstons would be only too happy to recompense her for such an inconvenience. Their car would be repaired, to be sure, in time for them to drive her home after they returned from the party.

She acquiesced grudgingly, and returned to her meal. She shuddered nervously. This was an unlooked-for turn of events, and she did not relish the thought of that long walk on All Hallows' Eve, but she could not change her plans now. The Cranstons were depending upon her. Her meal hastily consumed, she then hurried upstairs to tidy up.

It never took Miss Pilkington long to get ready. She wore no cosmetics (in her opinion all cosmetics were the work of the Devil and a sign of vanity) and her hair, brought back severely from her sharp-featured face, was tied into an old-fashioned knot at the nape of her neck; hence her coiffure needed no frequent retouching. Seeing her on the street, the casual observer might remark that Miss Pilkington's skirts were a bit too long to be modish, but Miss Pilkington was concerned with respectable appearance only,

and paid no attention to the capricious trends of fashion. Opaque lisle stockings and flat heeled walking shoes of the "sensible" variety completed Miss Pilkington's costume. On this night, however, a heavy wool coat and a huge black umbrella were added, because of inclement weather.

It was with a vague sense of unease that she left the stuffy warmth of Miss Simpkins' Residence for Refined Gentlewomen and, shielding herself with her large old-fashioned umbrella from the light drizzle of rain, wended her way towards the Cranston abode. The sidewalks were damp and slippery, and the weather dismal.

She passed by several teen-aged youngsters just leaving a motion picture theater. Miss Pilkington sniffed disdainfully. Moving pictures! More inventions of the Devil for the temptation of young souls. She herself could proudly state that she had never been inside a motion picture house. The lurid advertisements displayed outside were quite enough to assure her that she would never care to investigate farther.

Jack-o-lanterns leered at her from many of the shop windows as she passed by. Noisy children, out despite the unpleasant weather, many with raincoats over makeshift Hallowe'en costumes, ran up and down the streets. One brat, more bold

than the rest, and feeling secure beneath the realistic camouflage of a werewolf mask, crept up behind Miss Pilkington and startled her with a loud "Boo!" He laughed tauntingly as she jumped, frightened by this unexpected outburst.

"Little heathen!" she shouted indignantly, and brought her umbrella down sharply upon the hapless urchin. Miss Pilkington prided herself upon knowing how to deal with unruly children, and believed firmly in the use of the rod, although she never did so with any of the children that she took care of, lest their parents should object. Many a time the children needed a whipping, thought she, but there was no comprehending the new-fangled ideas of these modern parents.

BRISTLING WITH indignation, she crossed the street, her large black umbrella held at an angle which, although protecting her from the onslaught of the rain, obstructed her view somewhat. Suddenly, there was an ear-piercing screech of brakes, and Miss Pilkington found herself sprawled in the center of the street on the slippery pavement, with a curious crowd gathering about her.

"Jeez, lady, why'ncha look where yer goin'?" came a harassed voice from the driver of the car. "Are you all right?"

Dazedly, Miss Pilkington got

to her feet. "Yes, yes, I'm all right," she assured the crowd somewhat testily. "No, I don't need help, thank you." She glanced at her watch, fortunately intact despite her fall. Seven-forty-five! And she was supposed to be at the Cranstons' at eight! She hurried on. The crowd, perceiving that no one was hurt, dispersed.

"What a narrow escape that was!" Miss Pilkington thought. She remembered her sister's fate and shuddered. Inspecting her umbrella ruefully, she saw that it had become somewhat damaged, and in the excitement she had neglected to obtain the driver's name and license number. Oh well, too late now. With quickened steps she hastened on.

Breathlessly, she arrived at the Cranstons' Residence, at one minute to eight. She pressed the bell, and a succession of musical chimes sounded within. Slowly, the door swung inward and an apparition of the Devil confronted Miss Pilkington, who emitted an involuntary scream of terror.

"Come, come now, I don't look as realistic as all that!" boomed a jovial, reassuring voice. Miss Pilkington inspected the figure more closely and perceived it to be none other than Mr. Cranston, attired in Halloween costume.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she stammered, confusedly, "but you

looked like the dev . . . I mean, I didn't recognize you at first!"

"I'm sorry I frightened you. I had to answer the door personally. Thursday evening is both the maid's and the butler's night off. Come in."

Her mind hearkened back to her great grandfather's death at the hands of a friend, and she found herself entertaining doubts concerning Mr. Cranston.

He flashed her a devilish smile. "Come in," he repeated. "You must be cold after walking in all this rain. I do believe there's a storm brewing. Come on and warm yourself by the fireplace." He led the way to the drawing room, where Mrs. Cranston, resplendant in an elaborate Egyptian princess costume, was reading bedtime stories to her six year old son who, attired in woolly pink sleeping pajamas, snuggled cozily in her lap.

"Hello there," drawled Mrs. Cranston. "So nice to have you back again to stay with Teddy. So my husband's costume startled you, did it? I thought it extremely realistic myself!" She laughed gaily.

"I guess I'm rather upset anyway," replied Miss Pilkington, and proceeded to relate her harrowing experience with the automobile. "And just look at my umbrella; it's ruined beyond repair!" The little boy inspected that drooping and tattered arti-

cle with wide, interested eyes.

"Dear, dear, how annoying," exclaimed Mrs. Cranston. "I don't blame you for being upset. Won't you have a little drink to settle your nerves?" She proffered some amber liquid in a cut glass bottle.

Miss Pilkington flushed indignantly. "No, thank you," she replied in polite but frigid tones.

Mrs. Cranston, more amused than piqued, smiled indulgently and replaced the bottle within the liquor cabinet. Even if Miss Pilkington were a bit prudish, she was an honest and dependable person to look after Teddy. "I do hope that you won't be nervous staying alone in the house," she continued. "You know where the telephone is. If you want us for anything we'll be at the Brittingham's That's Cardinal 8159. By the way, they should be here soon, shouldn't they, dear?" She addressed this last remark to her husband, who nodded and glanced at his watch. "The Brittinghams have very kindly offered to call for us, since our car is being repaired at the garage," Mrs. Cranston explained to Miss Pilkington. "Our car will be repaired in time for us to drive you home after the party, however. Oh, there's the doorbell now! I'll bet that's them."

She arose hastily, and Teddy slid from her lap. "Goodbye,

dearie," she hurriedly kissed her little son. "Do lock up for us, will you, Miss Pilkington?" she added. "You're familiar with all the exits and entrances by now. Goodbye. We'll be home about twelve or twelve-thirty."

THE SLAM OF the front door echoed through the empty house. "How unutterably pagan!" sniffed Miss Pilkington, as they departed. "Civilized people celebrating Hallowe'en with costumes and false faces. I don't suppose they even realize they are perpetuating the evil traditions of the Devil's advocates! It is wicked, that's what it is!"

She proceeded to lock the various windows and doors. There were nine doors that she could remember, plus two french windows in the dining hall. She also closed all of the other windows. Although the steady downpour of rain had ceased, a strong wind was blowing, presaging a violent storm.

Teddy followed her about, and finally, when she settled herself comfortably before the blazing fire in the living room, said, "Read me a story, please."

Miss Pilkington looked disapprovingly at the garish paper-bound cartoon book he handed to her. Humph! "The Adventures of the Owl Man on Mars." What could the Cranstons be thinking of, filling their child's mind with such imaginative

nonsense, especially just before bed time?

"I have something much nicer here to read to you," cooed Miss Pilkington, drawing forth from her capacious handbag a book entitled "Ten Moral Tales for Good Little Children."

"I don't wanna hear *those* stories." Teddy emphatically objected. Then, he directed his attention to the ruined umbrella propped in a corner. "Ooh, your bumbershoot sure got wrecked, didn't it?" He surveyed it with amusement, and then opened the umbrella.

"Oh, don't open it in here!" protested Miss Pilkington.

"Why not?" queried the little boy, his eyebrows raised in a comical expression of surprise. "I won't hurt it. It's busted anyway."

Miss Pilkington didn't want to admit that she was superstitious about open umbrellas in the house bringing bad luck. As a matter of fact, she wasn't, usually, but on Hallowe'en, and in a strange lonely house — well, she didn't want to take any chances. "Oh, come sit on my lap and I'll read you a nice story," she said, changing the subject. Teddy obediently folded and put away the umbrella and clambered up on Miss Pilkington's bony knees. He balanced there as best he could while she read in a dry cracked voice one of the "Ten Moral Tales." Teddy drowsed.

The telephone rang, interrupting her recitation. She lifted the receiver and said "hello." A burst of demoniacal laughter greeted her ears. Horrified, she replaced the receiver.

"What's the matter, Miss Pilkington?" queried Teddy.

"Oh, nothing. It was just some children playing Hallowe'en tricks," she had replied, forcing a note of calmness into her voice. Was it a Hallowe'en prank, or was it . . . something else?

Maybe it was a burglar, phoning to ascertain whether she and Teddy were alone in the house before he broke in. Or kidnappers. She had read of such things in the newspapers. The devilish laughter still rang in her ears.

"I must get a grip on myself," she resolved. "I'm just being silly." She glanced at her watch — eight forty-five. Only three hours and fifteen minutes more until the stroke of midnight, when she would feel released from this insidious reign of terror for another year! Well, she'd read to Teddy until nine, and then take him to bed. The minutes ticked leadenly as she droned on in a monotonous voice. Teddy relapsed once more into a drowse.

Another glance at her watch told her it was nine o'clock. "Come now, Teddy, we'll go to bed," cooed Miss Pilkington, in

what was meant to be a sugary coaxing tone.

TEDDY RAISED NO objections, although he instinctively shrank from Miss Pilkington's cold, moist hands as she picked him up and carried him, pressed across her hard, flat bosom, upstairs to his room.

Miss Pilkington put Terry down as she entered his attractively furnished nursery. An array of toys was strewn over the floor. Suddenly, her feet went out from under her, and she fell, hitting her head against a gaily painted bureau. She had trod upon a toy fire truck.

"Oh, Miss Pilkington!" Teddy wailed, "You aren't hurt, are you?"

She was angered by the child's carelessness in leaving his play things scattered about, but managed a weak, forced smile as she said rather sharply, "No, Teddy, I'm all right, but perhaps now you'll realize the importance of putting away your toys."

Another near accident! Coincidence, or . . .? She rubbed the bruised place on her head. Teddy's childish solicitude pleased her, and although she had no genuine love for children, as she tucked Teddy into bed she could not help noticing how angelic he looked in his clean pink pajamas, with his tousled golden curls tumbling over the white pillow. He was, in her

opinion, despite his pampered existence amidst the atmosphere of cocktails, cigarettes, and the modern way of life, despite his enjoyment of those degrading comic books, one of the best behaved children that she had taken care of.

Miss Pilkington supervised his bedtime prayers, turned out the light, and returned downstairs. It was lonelier now, without Teddy to keep her company. The large, ornate clock in the hall boomed out nine-thirty. An outrageous hour for a six-year-old to be getting to bed, she mused. When *she* was a little girl, she always retired promptly at seven, even up to the time that she was twelve or thirteen years of age.

She settled down comfortably in an armchair and extracted from her enormous handbag a volume of "Little Gems of Victorian Verse," and began to read therefrom. She had read for about half an hour when she had a fleeting impression that she had heard something in the kitchen. Her scalp crawled beneath her tightly bound hair. She thought of 'phoning for help, but knew that she would appear ridiculous if it turned out to be merely her imagination. The noise might have been only the wind.

Armed with a poker from the fireplace, she timidly tiptoed into the kitchen. She switched on the light and stood tensely

waiting. No sound. Then, suddenly, behind her came a soft "thud, thud." She whirled around, her face a mask of fright. Nothing there. Again — "thud, thud". She almost sobbed with relief. It was the door leading from the kitchen to the basement. A draught of cold air made the door rattle, even though it was closed. Then she remembered that she had forgotten to bolt the cellar door. The wind had probably blown it open and this was the reason for the draught.

Hurriedly, she switched on the cellar light and ran down the shadowy stairs. There stood the door, wide open, the wind blowing in great gusts. The storm was really getting under way now. She slammed the door and bolted it. To think that she had been so careless! Why, anyone might have sneaked in. She thought of that anonymous 'phone call, and cold chills raced up and down her back as she rushed frantically upstairs and bolted the kitchen door leading to the basement.

Her heart a-flutter, she returned to the drawing room. Once more she resumed her reading, but somehow she could not keep her mind on the book. She kept glancing nervously around and behind her. Impatiently, she again looked at her watch — ten-thirty. One and one-half hours more.

Again her reading was inter-

rupted, this time by a heavy knocking at the front entrance. She put her book down and stood rooted to the spot. The peremptory rapping was repeated. She walked cautiously toward the door and called out, "Who's there?" but could hear no answer above the wail of the wind outside. Afraid to unbolt the entrance way, she opened the small aperture set in the panel, and peered outside. She could see no one. Did she fancy that she heard a taunting laugh above the sound of the wind? Bewildered and frightened, she returned to her place by the fireside. The dying embers glared up at her like red, hungry eyes of demons.

The storm outside increased in fury. Suddenly, all the lights went out, leaving Hortense Pilkington enveloped in gloomy darkness. Horrified, she crouched in her chair. The embers in the fireplace gave forth a faint glow, making weird shadows in the room, which were more terrifying than the total absence of light would have been.

MISS PILKINGTON was by now abjectly terrified. She no longer had any doubt but that she was inexorably being drawn into the power of the witch's curse. She reviewed the ominous events of the evening; first, the near accident with the automobile, then the mysteri-

ous telephone call, her falling in Teddy's nursery, the cellar door being left open (someone *might* have sneaked into the house at that, and might even now be lying in wait for her in the shadows! She shuddered at the thought), then the strange knocking at the door, and now the lights being turned out. She wished that she knew what time it was, but could not see the dial of her watch by the feeble light of the embers.

The darkness was fraught with unseen terrors. Was it her imagination, or was there someone — some *thing* — lurking in the shadows? Supposing that Teddy should awaken and become frightened and cry out? Could she summon enough courage to mount the stairs, or would unseen fingers clutch at her before she reached Teddy's room? She longed for Teddy to be by her side now — anyone, anything warm and comforting and alive.

The house assumed the aspect of a chamber of horrors. Why, it was filled with hundreds of the "clever inventions," and "so-called improvements for humanity" which the sorceress had mentioned in her curse so many years ago! If Meg Clayton's siprit were to manifest itself now, which of these instruments of the Devil would she choose to animate? The water heater in the cellar — supposing that should explode, killing her as it

had her grandfather? The heavy chandelier just above her head — supposing it should fall? Supposing she should get an electric shock while trying to turn on the lights? Every article of furniture in the room suddenly seemed charged with a malignant force. She half expected the curtains to reach out and strangle her, or the sofa pillows to suffocate her. Cold perspiration beaded her forehead. "Oh dear God!" she whispered fervently, desperately, "I don't want to die! Save me from the witch's curse!"

Suddenly, she thought of the telephone on the coffee stand beside her chair. Of course! The telephone! Strange how one's reason becomes paralyzed at a time like this. She lifted the receiver and dialed "Operator," hoping that she had dialed correctly in the dark. She listened. Something was wrong. There was no sound on the wires. Eventually she realized that the 'phone was dead. Hopelessly, she banged down the receiver, put her head in her arms, and sobbed aloud. Dimly she heard the sinister tones of the hall clock strike half past eleven. "Oh, only a half hour more! How ironic that the curse should have caught up with me now!" She sobbed unrestrainedly.

In the midst of her hysteria, the telephone rang. Eagerly, she snatched it up. Oh, how

comforting to hear the sound of a human voice, even if it were from miles away! But how could the telephone have rung? It was dead only a few moments ago. Her voice came falteringly. "H-hello?"

"Hello. This is the line man. I hope the electricity's being turned off didn't frighten you. The wind storm blew down some of the lines and left you without lights or 'phone service for awhile. Everything's O.K. now. The lines are repaired and the power's been restored. I drove up and knocked at your door to warn you about the temporary blackout so you wouldn't be scared, but I guess you didn't hear me. Is everything O.K. at your place now?"

Hortense Pilkington almost wept with relief. "Yes, oh yes!" she affirmed tremulously. "Thank you so much!" She hurriedly wiped away the remnants of her tears, blew her nose loudly on a dainty lace handkerchief, and smoothed back her hair. It was now eleven forty-five by her watch. Soon the Cranstons would be back. She must compose herself by then and get rid of all traces of her outburst. She mustn't let them know how foolishly she had behaved.

She went to the kitchen and ran some cold water on her face. Then she returned to the drawing room, turning on every lamp and electric light, bathing

the place in cheerful, pleasant brilliance. Miss Pilkington sat back comfortably in her easy chair, and picked up her "Little Gems of Victorian Verse." Although still somewhat shaken, she could almost laugh at her fears now.

"Miss Pilkington, Miss Pilkington!" Teddy's plaintive voice came from upstairs.

"What could that little rascal want at this hour?" she mumbled to herself in annoyance. Her watch indicated that it was just five minutes until midnight. She hurried up the stairs.

"Oh, Miss Pilkington!" repeated Teddy, and that lady fancied that she detected tears in his little voice. For a moment, the thought returned to her that someone might have sneaked into the house at the time she had left the cellar door open — might even be in Teddy's bedroom now — and that the terrified child might be calling for help. She hesitated at the door for an instant, but dismissed her thoughts, further emboldened by the fact that it was now five minutes until the termination of October thirty-first.

THE ROOM WAS in total darkness. Her foot came in contact with something soft and woolly lying across the floor. She remembered the plaintive urgency in Teddy's voice. Her heart seemed to cease beating as she stood there, too terrified

to scream. Finally, her trembling fingers located the switch for the night lamp. There was Teddy, sitting bolt upright in his bed, his eyes wide with horror. Nonplussed, Hortense Pilkington directed her gaze to what lay at her feet — a large sized cuddly teddy bear! She breathed a long sigh of relief and hurried to Teddy's bedside. "What is it? Why did you cry out?" she asked.

"Oh, Miss Pilkington, I had an *awful* dream about an old witch standing over my bed, an' she . . ."

"But that was just a dream," Miss Pilkington said. "Everything's all right now. Go back to sleep."

"Kiss me goodnight first," Teddy begged.

Miss Pilkington had a violent distaste of physical contact of any sort, even when it came to kissing children goodnight, but seeing the imploring look in Teddy's large blue eyes, she complied. It was odd how she never noticed before tonight what a sweet, adorable child Teddy was. As she leaned toward him, the big clock downstairs began to toll the hour of midnight. Teddy's golden curls touched her stringy gray hair; his chubby arms went around her neck. Some latent maternal instinct within her caused her to draw him close.

Suddenly, the chubby arms became wiry and muscular, the

dimpled, childish hands became elongated, and developed sharp talons. Startled, Miss Pilkington opened her eyes and saw — not Teddy's innocent blue ones, but red demon orbs boring into her

own. Sharp fangs bit into her scrawny neck. She screamed once, shrilly, and as the hall clock's last somber tone denoting midnight faded away, Miss Pilkington sank into oblivion.

New Frontiers Beyond The Compass of Science

Is the spectacular religion of Vodoun — generally called "voodoo" — pathological orgies, with virgins being raped on unhallowed altars? HAROLD PREECE, who has been called "the American Lewis Spence", answers that question through an interview with MADAM ARBOO, High Priestess of American Vodoun. This is the first definitive statement of this celebrated old cult ever made, in the words of one of its authorized shaman, in any magazine anywhere. It's indispensable for any student of ancient, pre-Christian religions.

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A Psychological Experiment

by Richard Marsh

Our thanks to Richard Witter for steering us to the collection, **The Seen And The Unseen**, by Richard Marsh, whence comes this story. It was first published in London by Metheun & Co. in 1900. The edition we have on hand is that of the Metheun Shilling Novels line, and the list of other novels (?) it presents in the advertising sections includes two other collections of short stories by this author. About Richard Marsh himself, alas, we can tell you nothing other than what you can deduce for yourself by reading this powerful tale.

THE CONVERSATION had been of murders and of suicides. It had almost seemed as if each speaker had felt constrained to cap the preceding speaker's tale of horror. As the talk went on, Mr. Howitt had drawn farther and farther into a corner of the room, as if the subject were lit-

tle to his liking. Now that all the speakers but one had quitted the smoking-room, he came forward from his corner, in the hope, possibly, that with this last remaining individual, who, like himself, had been a silent listener, he might find himself in more congenial society.

"Dreadful stuff those fellows have been talking!"

Mr. Howitt was thin and he was tall. He seemed shorter than he really was, owing to what might be described as a persistent cringe rather than a stoop. He had a deferential, almost frightened air. His pallid face was lighted by a smile which one felt might, in a moment, change into a stare of terror. He rubbed his hands together softly, as if suffering from a chronic attack of nerves; he kept giving furtive glances round the room.

In reply to Mr. Howitt's observation the stranger nodded his head. There was something in the gesture, and indeed in the man's whole appearance, which caused Mr. Howitt to regard him more attentively. The stranger's size was monstrous. By him on the table was a curious-looking box, about eighteen inches square, painted in hideously alternating stripes of blue and green and yellow; and although it was spring, and the smoking-room was warm, he wore his overcoat and a soft felt hat. So far as one could judge from his appearance, seated, he was at least six feet in height. As to girth, his dimensions were bewildering. One could only guess wildly at his weight. To add to the peculiarity of his appearance, he wore a huge black beard, which not

only hung over his chest, but grew so high up his cheeks as almost to conceal his eyes.

Mr. Howitt took the chair which was in front of the stranger. His eyes were never for a moment still, resting, as they passed, upon the bearded giant in front of him, then flashing quickly hither and thither about the room.

"Do you stay in Jersey long?"

"No."

The reply was monosyllabic, but, though it was heard so briefly, at the sound of the stranger's voice Mr. Howitt half rose, grasped the arm of his chair, and gasped. The stranger seemed surprised.

"What's the matter?"

MR HOWITT dropped back on to his seat. He took out his handkerchief to wipe his forehead. His smile, which had changed into a stare of terror on its reappearance, assumed a sickly hue.

"Nothing. Only a curious similarity."

"Similarity? What do you mean?"

Whatever Mr. Howitt might mean, every time the stranger opened his mouth it seemed to give him another shock. It was a moment or two before he regained sufficient control over himself to enable him to answer.

"Your voice reminds me of one which I used to hear. It's a mere fugitive resemblance."

"Whose voice does mine remind you of?"

"A friend's."

"What was his name?"

"His name was — Cookson."

Mr. Howitt spoke with a perceptible stammer.

"Cookson? I see."

There was silence. For some cause, Mr. Howitt seemed on a sudden to have gone all limp. He sat in a sort of heap on his chair. He smoothed his hands together, as if with unconscious volition. His sickly smile had degenerated into a fatuous grin. His shifty eyes kept recurring to the stranger's face in front of him. It was the stranger who was the next to speak.

"Did you hear what those men were talking about?"

"Yes."

"They were talking of murders."

"Yes."

"I heard rather a curious story of a murder as I came down to Weymouth in the train."

"It's a sort of talk I do not care for."

"No. Perhaps not; but this was rather a singular tale. It was about a murder which took place the other day at Exeter."

Mr. Howitt started. "At Exeter?"

"Yes; at Exeter."

The stranger stood up. As he did so, one realized how grotesquely unwieldy was his bulk. It seemed to be as much as he

could do to move. The three pockets in the front of his overcoat were protected by buttoned flaps. He undid the buttons. As he did so the flaps began to move. Something peeped out. Then hideous things began to creep from his pockets — efts, newts, lizards, various crawling creatures. Mr. Howitt's eyes ceased to stray. They were fastened on the crawling creatures. The hideous things wriggled and writhed in all directions over the stranger. The huge man gave himself a shake. They all fell from him to the floor. They lay for a second as if stupified by the fall. Then they began to move to all four quarters of the room. Mr. Howitt drew his legs under his chair.

"Pretty creatures, aren't they?" said the stranger. "I like to carry them about with me wherever I go. Don't let them touch you. Some of them are nasty if they bite."

MR. HOWITT tucked his long legs still farther under his chair. He regarded the creatures which were wriggling on the floor with a degree of aversion which was painful to witness. The stranger went on. "About this murder at Exeter, which I was speaking of. It was a case of two solicitors who occupied offices together on Fore Street Hill."

Mr. Howitt glanced up at the

stranger, then back again at the writhing newts. He rather gasped than spoke. "Fore Street Hill?"

"Yes — they were partners. The name of one of them was Rolt — Andrew Rolt. By the way, I like to know with whom I am talking. May I inquire what your name is?"

This time Mr. Howitt was staring at the stranger with wide-open eyes, momentarily forgetful even of the creatures which were actually crawling beneath his chair. He stammered and he stuttered.

"My name's — Howitt. You'll see it in the hotel register."

"Howitt? — I see — I'm glad I have met you, Mr. Howitt. It seems that this man, Andrew Rolt, murdered his partner, a man named Douglas Colston."

Mr. Howitt was altogether oblivious of the things upon the floor. He clutched at the arms of his chair. His voice was shrill. "Murdered! How do they know he murdered him?"

"It seems they have some shrewd ideas upon the point, from this."

The stranger took from an inner pocket of his overcoat what proved, when he had unfolded it, to be a double-crown poster. He held it up in front of Mr. Howitt. It was headed in large letters, "*Murder! £100 Reward.*"

"You see, they are offering £100 reward for the apprehen-

sion of this man, Andrew Rolt. That looks as if someone had suspicions. Here is his description: Tall, thin, stoops; has sandy hair, thin on top, parted in the middle; restless gray eyes; wide mouth, bad teeth, thin lips; white face; speaks in a low, soft voice; has a nervous trick of rubbing his hands together." The stranger ceased reading from the placard to look at Mr. Howitt. "Are you aware sir, that this description is very much like you?"

MR. HOWITT'S eyes were riveted on the placard. They had followed the stranger as he read. His manner was feverishly strained.

"It's not. Nothing of the sort. It's your imagination. It's not in the least like me."

"Pardon me, but the more I look at you the more clearly I perceive how strong is the resemblance. It is you to the life. As a detective" — he paused, Mr. Howitt held his breath — "I mean supposing I were a detective, which I am not" — he paused again, Mr. Howitt gave a gasp of relief — "I should feel almost justified in arresting you and claiming the reward. You are so made in the likeness of Andrew Rolt."

"I'm not. I deny it! It's a lie!"

Mr. Howitt stood up. His voice rose to a shriek. A fit of trembling came over him. It constrained him to sit down

again. The stranger seemed amused.

"My dear sir! I entreat you to be calm. I was not suggesting for one moment that you had any actual connection with the miscreant Rolt. The resemblance must be accidental. Did you not tell me your name was Howitt?"

"Yes; that's my name, Howitt — William Howitt."

"Any relation to the poet?"

"Poet?" Mr. Howitt seemed mystified; then, to make a dash at it, "Yes; my great-uncle."

"I congratulate you, Mr. Howitt, on your relationship. I have always been a great admirer of your great-uncle's works. Perhaps I had better put this poster away. It may be useful for future reference."

The stranger, folding up the placard, replaced it in his pocket. With a quick movement of his fingers he did something which detached what had seemed to be the inner lining of his overcoat from the coat itself — splitting the garment, as it were, and making it into two. As he did so, there fell from all sides of him another horde of crawling creatures. They dropped like lumps of jelly on to the floor, and remained for some seconds, a wriggling mass. Then, like their forerunners, they began to make incursions towards all the points of the compass. Mr. Howitt, already in a condition of considerable

agitation, stared at these ungainly forms in a state of mind which seemed to approach to stupefaction.

"More of my pretty things, you perceive. I'm very fond of reptiles. I always have been. Don't allow any of them to touch you. They might do you an injury. Reptiles sometimes do." He turned a little away from Mr. Howitt. "I heard some particulars of this affair at Exeter. It seems that these two men, Rolt and Colston, were not only partners in the profession of the law, they were also partners in the profession of swindling. Thorough-paced rogues, both of them. Unfortunately, there is not a doubt of it. But it appears that the man Rolt was not only false to the world at large, he was false even to his partner. Don't you think, Mr. Howitt, that it is odd that a man should be false to his partner?"

THE INQUIRY was unheeded. Mr. Howitt was gazing at the crawling creatures which seemed to be clustering about his chair.

"Ring the bell!" he gasped. "Ring the bell! Have them taken away!"

"Have what taken away? My pretty playthings? My dear sir, to touch them would be dangerous. If you are very careful not to move from your seat, I think I may guarantee that you will be safe. You did not notice my

question. Don't you think it odd that a man should be false to his partner?"

"Eh? — Oh! — Yes; very."

The stranger eyed the other intently. There was something in Mr. Howitt's demeanor which, to say the least of it, was singular.

"I thought you would think it was odd. It appears that one night the two men agreed that they would divide spoils. They proceeded to do so then and there. Colston, wholly unsuspecting of evil, was seated at a table, making up a partnership account. Rolt, stealing up behind him, stupefied him with chloroform."

"It wasn't chloroform."

"Not chloroform? May I ask how you know?"

"I — guessed it."

"For a stranger, rather a curious subject on which to hazard a guess, don't you think so? However, allowing your guess, we will say it was not chloroform. Whatever it was, it stupefied Colston. Rolt, when he perceived Colston was senseless, produced a knife — like this."

The stranger flourished in the air a big steel blade, which was shaped like a hunting-knife. As he did so, throwing his overcoat from him on to the floor, he turned right round towards Mr. Howitt. Mr. Howitt stared at him voiceless. It was not so much at the sufficiently ugly weapon he was holding in his

hand at which he stared, as at the man himself. The stranger, indeed, presented an extraordinary spectacle. The upper portion of his body was enveloped in some sort of oilskin — such as sailors wear in dirty weather. The oilskin was inflated to such an extent that the upper half of him resembled nothing so much as a huge ill-shaped bladder. That it was inflated was evident, with something, too, that was conspicuously alive. The oilskin writhed and twisted, surged and heaved, in a fashion that was anything but pleasant to behold.

"You look at me! See here!"

The stranger dashed the knife he held into his own breast, or he seemed to. He cut the oilskin open from top to bottom. And there gushed forth, not his heart's blood, but an amazing mass of hissing, struggling, twisting serpents. They fell, all sorts and sizes, in a confused, furious, frenzied heap, upon the floor. In a moment the room seemed to be alive with snakes. They dashed hither and thither in and out, round and round, in search either of refuge or revenge. And, as the snakes came on, the efts, the newts, the lizards, and the other creeping things, in their desire to escape them, crawled up the curtains, and the doors, and the walls.

MR. HOWITT gave utterance to a sort of strangled ex-

clamation. He retained sufficient presence of mind to spring upon the seat of his chair, and to sit upon the back of it. The stranger remained standing, apparently wholly unmoved, in the midst of the seeming pandemonium of creepy things.

"Do you not like snakes, Mr. Howitt? I do! They appeal to me strongly. This is part of my collection. I rather pride myself on the ingenuity of the contrivance which enables me to carry my pets about with me wherever I may go. At the same time you are wise in removing your feet from the floor. Not all of them are poisonous. Possibly the more poisonous ones may not be able to reach you where you are. You see this knife?" The stranger extended it towards Mr. Howitt. "This is the knife with which, when he had stupefied him, Andrew Rolt slashed Douglas Colston about the head and face and throat like this!"

The removal of his overcoat, and, still more, the vomiting forth of the nest of serpents, had decreased the stranger's bulk by more than one-half. Disembarrassing himself of the remnants of his oilskins, he removed his soft felt hat, and, tearing off his huge black beard, stood revealed as a tall, upstanding, muscularly-built man, whose head and face and neck were almost entirely concealed by strips of plaster, which crossed

and recrossed each other in all possible and impossible directions.

There was silence. The two men stared at each other. With a gasp Mr. Howitt found his voice. "Douglas!"

"Andrew!"

"I thought you were dead."

"I am risen from the grave."

"I am glad you are not dead."

"Why?"

Mr. Howitt paused as if to moisten his parched lips. "I never meant to kill you."

"In that case, Andrew, your meaning was unfortunate. I do mean to kill you — now."

"Don't kill me, Douglas."

"A reason, Andrew?"

"If you knew what I have suffered since I thought I had killed you, you would not wish to take upon yourself the burden which I have had to bear."

"My nerves, Andrew, are stronger than yours. What would crush you to the ground would not weigh on me at all. Surely you knew that before." Mr. Howitt fidgeted on the back of his chair. "It was not that you did not mean to kill me. You lacked the courage. You gashed me like some frenzied cur. Then, afraid of your own handiwork, you ran to save your skin. You dared not wait to see if what you had meant to do was done. Why, Andrew, as soon as the effects of your drug had gone, I sat up. I heard you running down the stairs, I saw

your knife lying at my side, all stained with my own blood — see, Andrew, the stains are on it still! I even picked up this scrap of paper which had fallen from your pocket on to the floor.”

He held out a piece of paper towards Mr. Howitt.

“It is the advertisement of a hotel — Hotel de la Couronne d’Or, St. Helier’s, Jersey. I said to myself, I wonder if that is where Andrew is gone. I will go and see. And if I find him I will kill him. I have found you, and behold, your heart has so melted within you that already you feel something of the pangs of death.” Mr. Howitt did seem to be more dead than alive. His face was bloodless. He was shivering as if with cold.

“These melodramatic and, indeed, slightly absurd details” — the stranger waved his hand towards the efts, and newts, and snakes, and lizards — “were planned for your especial benefit. I was aware what a horror you had of creeping things. I take it, it is constitutional. I knew I had but to spring on you half a bushel or so of reptiles, and all the little courage you ever had would vanish. As it has done.”

THE STRANGER stopped. He looked, with evident enjoyment of his misery, at the miserable creature squatted on the back of the chair in front of him. Mr. Howitt tried to speak.

Two or three times he opened his mouth, but there came forth no sound. At last he said, in curiously husky tones, “Douglas?”

“Andrew?”

“If you do it they are sure to have you. It is not easy to get away from Jersey.”

“How kind of you, Andrew, and how thoughtfull! But you might have spared yourself your thought. I have arranged all that. There is a cattle-boat leaves for St. Malo in half an hour on the tide. You will be dead in less than half an hour — so I go in that.”

Again there were movements of Mr. Howitt’s lips. But no words were audible. The stranger continued.

“The question which I have had to ask myself has been, how shall I kill you? I might kill you with the knife with which you endeavored to kill me.” As he spoke, he tested the keenness of the blade with his fingers. “With it I might slit your throat from ear to ear, or I might use it in half a hundred different ways. Or I might shoot you like a dog.” Producing a revolver, he pointed it at Mr. Howitt’s head. “Sit quite still, Andrew, or I may be tempted to flatten your nose with a bullet. You know I can shoot straight. Or I might avail myself of this.”

Still keeping the revolver pointed at Mr. Howitt’s head, he took from his waistcoat pocket a small syringe.

"This, Andrew, is a hypodermic syringe. I have but to take firm hold of you, thrust the point into one of the blood-vessels of your neck, and inject the contents; you will at once endure exquisite tortures which, after two or three minutes, which will seem to you like centuries, will result in death. But I have resolved to do myself, and you, this service, with none of the three."

Again the stranger stopped. This time Mr. Howitt made no attempt to speak. He was not a pleasant object to contemplate. As the other had said, to judge from his appearance he already seemed to be suffering some pangs of death. All the manhood had gone from him. Only the shell of what was meant to be a man remained. The exhibition of his pitiful cowardice afforded his whilom partner unqualified pleasure.

"Have you ever heard of an author named De Quincey? He wrote on murder, considered as a fine art. It is as a fine art I have had to consider it. In that connection I have had to consider three things: 1. That you must be killed. 2. That you must be killed in such a manner that you shall suffer the greatest possible amount of pain. 3 — and not the least essential — That you must be killed in such a manner that under no circumstances can I be found guilty of having caused your death. I

have given these three points my careful consideration, and I have been able to find something which will satisfy all the requirements. That something is in this box."

THE STRANGER went to the box which was on the table — the square box which had, as ornamentation, the hideously alternating stripes of blue and green and yellow. He rapped on it with his knuckles. As he did so, from within it there came a peculiar sound like a sullen murmur.

"You hear? It is death calling to you from the box. It awaits its prey. It bids you come."

He struck the box a little bit harder. There proceeded from it, as if responsive to his touch, what seemed to be a series of sharp and angry screeches.

"Again! It loses patience. It grows angry. It bids you hasten. Ah!"

He brought his hand down heavily upon the top of the box. Immediately the room was filled with a discord of sounds, cries, yelpings, screams, snarls, the tumult dying away in what seemed to be an intermittent, sullen roaring. The noise served to rouse the snakes, and efts, and lizards to renewed activity. The room seemed again to be alive with them. As he listened, Mr. Howitt became livid. He was, apparently, becoming imbecile with terror.

His aforetime partner, turning to him, pointed to the box with outstretched hand.

"What a row it makes! What a rage it's in! Your death screams out to you, with a ravening longing — the most awful death that a man can die. Andrew — to die! And such a death as this!"

Again he struck the box. Again there came from it that dreadful discord.

"Stand up!"

Mr. Howitt looked at him as a drivelling idiot might look at a keeper whom he fears. It seemed as if he made an effort to frame his lips for the utterance of speech. But he had lost the control of his muscles. With every fiber of his being he seemed to make a dumb appeal for mercy to the man in front of him. The appeal was made in vain. The command was repeated.

"Get off your chair, and stand upon the floor."

Like some trembling automaton Mr. Howitt did as he was told. He stood there like some lunatic deaf mute. It seemed as if he could not move, save at the bidding of his master. That master was careful not to loosen, by so much as a hair's-breadth, the hold he had of him.

"I now proceed to put into execution the most exquisite part of my whole scheme. Were I to unfasten the box and let death loose upon you, some time or

other it might come out — these things do come out at times — and it might then appear that the deed had, after all, been mine. I would avoid such risks. So you shall be your own slayer, Andrew. You shall yourself unloose the box, and you shall yourself give death its freedom, so that it may work on you its will. The most awful death that a man can die! Come to me, here!"

And the man went to him, moving with a curious, stiff gait, such as one might expect from an automaton. The creatures writhing on the floor went unheeded, even though he trod on them.

"Stand still in front of the box." The man stood still. "Kneel down."

THE MAN DID hesitate. There did seem to come to him some consciousness that he should himself be the originator of his own volition. There did come on to his distorted visage an agony of supplication which it was terrible to witness.

The only result was an emphasized renewal of the command.

"Kneel down upon the floor."

And the man knelt down. His face was within a few inches of the painted box. As he knelt the stranger struck the box once more with the knuckles of his hand. And again there came from it that strange tumult of discordant sounds.

"Quick, Andrew, quick, quick! Press your finger on the spring! Unfasten the box!"

The man did as he was bid. And, in an instant, like a conjurer's trick, the box fell all to pieces, and there sprang from it, right into Mr. Howitt's face, with a dreadful noise, some dreadful thing which enfolded his head in its hideous embraces.

There was a silence.

Then the stranger laughed. He called softly, "Andrew!"

All was still. "Andrew!" Again there was none that answered. The laughter was renewed.

"I do believe he's dead. I had always supposed that the stories about being able to frighten a man to death were all apocryphal. But that a man could be frightened to death by a thing like this — a toy!"

He touched the creature which concealed Mr. Howitt's

head and face. As he said, it was a toy. A development of the old-fashioned jack-in-the-box. A dreadful development, and a dreadful toy. Made in the image of some creature of the squid class, painted in livid hues, provided with a dozen long, quivering tentacles, each actuated by a spring of its own. It was these tentacles which had enfolded Mr. Howitt's head in their embraces.

As the stranger put them from him, Mr. Howitt's head fell, face foremost on to the table. His partner, lifting it up, gazed down at him.

Had the creature actually been what it was intended to represent, it could not have worked more summary execution. The look which was on the dead man's face as his partner turned it upwards, was terrible to see.



A Dream Of Falling

by Attila Hatvany

This story came to us through Peter R. Stoler, who writes, "Last year, while touring Europe, I made a trip into Hungary and while in Budapest made the acquaintance of a young medical student named Attila Hatvany. This young man had written several stories for publication in *Nyugat*, a Hungarian literary magazine, as well as for the local newspapers, and had at that time published a series of articles in a student medical journal. He asked me if I would mind translating some of his work with a view to marketing it in the United States, and last month sent me the enclosed story." We're delighted to introduce Attila Hatvany to you, and suspect you will be seeing a good deal more of his work, in various publications, in times to come.

FERENC WAS VERY tired, and after he had been standing at the tram stop for ten minutes, he began to grow impatient. He had left Juci's flat at eleven, and had walked quickly to the corner to be certain of catching the last tram at half-past the hour. Although delays of fifteen

minutes or more were not uncommon during the working hours of the day, due to the heavy demands placed upon the city's overworked electric power plants, the night trams usually ran very close to schedule. That he was on time, he knew, so he dismissed from his mind the

thought that the tram might already have passed this corner. It must be late, he thought, and with the impatience of youth, cursed it.

He looked about him. He was the only one on the street, but there was nothing unusual about this; in a "respectable" working-class neighborhood such as this, the streets were usually empty after dark, peopled only by occasional paired police officers, strolling with heavy steps along the cobbled pavement.

Ferenc stood on a concrete island in the center of the wide street. Both sides of the thoroughfare were lined with run-down three and four-story buildings which stretched like the walls of a canyon in both directions to disappear into the darkness. There were no lights in any of the buildings and the blank windows which they presented to the street were like sightless eyes. The street's sole illumination was provided by the pale globes atop the widely-spaced lampposts which spread their sickly glow in small circles at the feet of the iron poles.

Standing under one of the lights, Ferenc looked at his watch. It read a quarter to twelve. From far down the street came the faint echo of footsteps, their measured sounds drawing nearer. At last, after straining his eyes to see through the shadows of the dark avenue, Ferenc made out the figures of two police-

men, their uniform buttons shining dimly as they passed under a streetlight. As they neared him, they crossed the street to the tram island and approached, one walking slightly behind the other.

WHEN THE FIRST policeman was a few paces away, Ferenc hailed him loudly. "Good evening, officer," he called. "Do you know if the trams are running tonight?"

"Why shouldn't they be running?" answered the officer in an annoyed tone.

"I don't know," said Ferenc, "but the number five tram, which was due a quarter of an hour ago, hasn't come yet."

"The number five, you say?" asked the first officer, halting a pace from Ferenc. His companion remained a few paces in his rear.

"Yes, of course, the number five," Ferenc said.

"Hmm," mumbled the policeman. Then, "Let me see your papers."

"Yes, your papers," said his companion, speaking for the first time.

"Here they are," said Ferenc, producing his identity cards and handing them to the policeman, who took an electric torch from his pocket to read them.

The officer, who had a hairless, round face with deep-set eyes and a hard, straight mouth, studied the papers for a mom-

ent and then gestured over his shoulder to his companion. The second policeman came up, and by the light of the torch, examined the papers. His face was the same as that of the first policeman.

"Yes," said the first officer after a moment. "Just as I thought. You'd better take number eleven tram."

Ferenc protested. "But number eleven doesn't go to my section of the city. It goes to Eszterhazy square. And besides, it doesn't run on this line."

"No arguments," said the second policeman, drawing himself up. "Number eleven for you."

"But . . ." Ferenc tried to argue.

The first policeman, who was also at attention, cut his protests short. "No arguments," he said. "Just do as you're told. Take number eleven tram. It will be along soon."

The two policemen were alike in build and stood the same height. *They must be twins*, though Ferenc drowsily. *Or at least brothers*. And they must be mad, too, he thought, for he knew that the number eleven tram did not run on this line.

"Here are your papers," said one of the policemen. Ferenc was now uncertain which one it was, the first or the second. "And remember," the officer went on, "take tram number eleven. Do as you're told and you'll be all

right, citizen. Otherwise, there'll be trouble for you."

Mumbling something about co-operating with them, Ferenc watched them go.

A FEW MOMENTS later, he saw the single headlight of the tram, probing the darkness like a searching eye, and heard the rattling and screeching of the car as it lurched along the track. In another moment, it stopped before him and as he was about to step aboard he noticed that it bore the number eleven lettered in red on a white plaque beside the door.

"Hello," he called through the open door to the tram driver, "do you go to Dohanyi Street?"

"Get on," came the answer, "we're late."

"But I've never seen a number eleven car on this line before," Ferenc said.

"Trouble with you young people is that you have no discipline," said the driver petulantly. "Now get on so I can finish my trip."

"All right," said Ferenc wearily. He climbed up, walked past the tram driver, whose face, he noticed, was identical with those of the two policemen, and sat down heavily on a seat in the middle of the car. The tram immediately began careening along its track at a dizzying speed, and exhausted, Ferenc found he could barely keep his eyes his eyes open.

How strange, he thought, looking out at the rows of darkened houses which flashed past. The rocking, swaying motion of the tram made his sleepy, and his head nodded toward his chest. He had just closed his eyes for a moment when he felt a hand on his shoulder. Raising his gaze only slightly, he saw a brass-buttoned chest on which hung the ticket machine of the fare collector.

"To Dohanyi Street," said Ferenc, handing him a coin.

The fare collector laughed and adjusted the levers of his little machine.

"Aren't you the young man who's going to the end of the line?" he said. "Of course you are." He dropped Ferenc's coin into the leather pouch at his side and cranked the handle of the ticket machine. Like a child sticking out its tongue, the machine spewed out a strip of paper, which the fare collector tore off and handed to Ferenc. On it was printed the word "terminal" and the date.

"There's a good fellow," said the fare collector, handing the ticket to Ferenc and turning to move away.

"Wait," said Ferenc, catching him by the arm. He looked eagerly at the man. "Are you by any chance related to the tram driver, or to the policemen?"

"You young people," said the fare collector shaking his head "always asking questions. Of

course we're related." And before Ferenc could question him any further, he moved to the front of the tram, and standing next to the driver, began talking to him.

I'M TIRED, Ferenc thought. *I must have fallen asleep for a moment. Or perhaps I'm coming down with a fever.* He was about to leave his seat and ask the two men to tell him where the tram was going, but the warning of the policemen still echoed in his ears. Hadn't they told him he'd be all right if he just did as he was told? *After all*, he thought, *I told the driver and the fare collector where I was going. And if they insist on taking me to the end of the line then it must be a different line which ends at Dohanyi Street. Tram schedules and routes are always being changed, and this may be just a special line for night service.* The neighborhood through which the tram was passing, he noticed, was different from any he knew.

The car, he noticed, was passing through sections of the city which he had never seen before, and which he had not even known existed. Now it clattered between rows of blank-walled buildings, now past a great church, whose doors, strangely, were open. Then it passed along a tree-lined avenue, brilliantly lit, its sidewalks crowded with people. One of the people

was Juci, and Ferenc leaned out the tram window and waving, called to her, but she didn't seem to see him, and took no notice as the tram went by. He saw others of his friends, too, walking briskly past the windows of the shops on the street. Mingling with the crowd were off-duty soldiers, their uniforms making them stand out from the plainer dress of the others. They all had round, hairless faces with deep-set eyes and hard, straight mouths.

It is all very strange, thought Ferenc. I am dreaming and the strangest thing is that I know I'm dreaming. And what an unusual dream. No, all dreams are unusual. But I hope I can remember it in the morning so I can tell Juci about it.

The tram had left the wide avenue and now moved through a factory district. Looking out the window, Ferenc, who was its only passenger, saw a sign reading "Dohanyi Street."

"We must be approaching it from another direction," he said half aloud, "for I don't recognize it. He reached up and rang the signal bell and started to rise from his seat to get off the tram.

At the sound of the bell, the tram driver turned and said angrily, "Sit down. Your ticket is for the end of the line."

Stunned, Ferenc sat down.

THE TRAM LEFT the city

and passed between some low, sandy hills. Ferenc remembered no hills like this around the city and found them a pleasant change from the scenery to which he was accustomed. *What a remarkable dream, he thought. I am dreaming of a countryside which doesn't exist anywhere in the entire province.* From the hills, the tram moved on to a forest, dark and gloomy, with gnarled, strangely-shaped trees. Finally, it came to the edge of the desert and started across.

Ferenc had never seen a desert before, and was fascinated by the sight. On either side of the red-painted tram stretched a drab, flinty plain. Low dunes rose on the edges and overhead glinted the lights of thousands of stars. Far away, dust-devils blew and danced across the burning soil, while heat waves shimmered.

Suddenly, with a clang of its iron bells, the tram halted beside a small platform. In the shadows at the rear of the platform stood two shadowy figures. There was nothing else in sight except the mounds of sand.

"Here's the terminal," said the tram driver. "You get off here."

"There's a good fellow," said the fare collector kindly as Ferenc stepped down. As soon as he alit, the two men reversed the trolley, rang the bells and set off again in the direction from which they had come. They

left so quickly that Ferenc had no time to call after them.

As Ferenc watched the tram disappear, the two figures from the back of the platform drew near. They were policemen, and might have been the two who had accosted him earlier in the night.

"You're late," said the first as he reached Ferenc.

"I'm sorry," said Ferenc, "but it wasn't my fault. You see, the tram was behind schedule."

"Always blaming someone else," said the second policeman. "You young folks never want to take the responsibility for anything." He paused and shrugged his shoulders. "No matter, though. Come along."

NUMBLY, FERENC fell into step between the pair. They left the terminal and walked across the sand and past a small hill. On the other side was a church, its priest standing in the doorway with his hands clasped across his stomach. When he saw them approach, he ran inside, and a moment later, Ferenc heard the pealing of bells. Beyond the church was a scaffold. From a gibbet, a noose swung in the gentle breeze. On the platform stood a tall man in a policeman's uniform with a mask covering his face. He came down off the scaffold to meet them as they neared it, and after exchanging greetings with the

officers, shook hands cordially with Ferenc.

"So he's the one to be hanged," he said, indicating Ferenc.

"That's right," answered the two policemen in chorus. "Here are the papers," said one, handing over a large envelope.

The man in the mask took the papers and sat down on the steps leading up to the scaffold platform to read them. When he finished, he took a pen out of one of his pockets and handed it to Ferenc. "Sign here," he said, pointing, "and here, and here, too."

"Thank you," he said after Ferenc signed. He handed the papers to one of the officers, who tore off a piece and handed it back to him.

"Now," said the hangman, "if you'll just step up here."

Ferenc was starting to climb the scaffold when one of his escorts stopped him. "Wait a bit," he said to the hangman, "aren't his hands supposed to be tied?"

"No," said the other policeman.

"Why, I think that's optional," said the hangman.

"You're wrong," said the first policeman, "it's the hood that's optional." They argued back and forth, their protestations becoming more vehement, until Ferenc thought they would come to blows. Finally, they agreed to settle their argument by looking in the book of regulations covering hangings.

WHILE THEY thumbed through a huge, dog-eared volume, Ferenc sat on the steps. *Even when they hang a man, he thought, the officials have to argue about how it's to be done.* Then he wondered if the late supper Juci had prepared for him before he left her flat was causing him to have this singular dream. *I must remember to tell her about it,* he thought.

The policemen finished arguing and slammed their book shut. The hangman came down to him with a short length of cord in his hands, and asking Ferenc to place his arms at his sides with his hands behind his back, bound him tightly.

"On your feet, young fellow," he said, helping him to rise. "Now up you go. I'll give you a hand. You're probably off your balance with your hands tied like that."

Ferenc thanked him as he was helped up the steep stairs. When he reached the platform, he turned and saw the two policemen standing at the foot of the stairs, looking up at him. Their faces were set in hard, official expressions.

"How about a hood?" asked the hangman. Ferenc shook his head and the officer continued, "That's all right. You don't have

to use one, even though a lot of them do."

"He's really a good fellow," said one of the policemen at the foot of the scaffold suddenly, his face softening. "It's too bad we've got to hang him."

"Yes," agreed his companion.

"Oh well," said the hangman, patting Ferenc's shoulder. "Orders are orders. We all do what we have to. You understand, don't you?"

"Of course," said Ferenc as the noose was slipped over his head and tightened around his neck.

What a silly dream, he thought. Here I am telling them to hang me. I wonder if I'll wake up before they spring the trap door. In a dream of falling they say you always wake up before you hit the ground. Perhaps it's that way with this kind of dream, too. I'll never find out unless I go through with it.

"All ready?" asked the hangman.

"Ready," said the policemen.

"Ready," said Ferenc.

He was thinking of how amused Juci would be by his story when the trap door opened and he was waiting to wake up when the felt himself falling. He was still waiting when the knot snapped against the back of his head and broke his neck.



The Truth About Pyecraft

by H. G. Wells

In fantastic literature, a very frequent fault is that of ignoring secondary implications of the initial assumptions. Sometimes, this is necessary for the sake of the story, but more often it has been a case of an author's not thinking his primary assumptions through, and thus perpetrating absurdities which marred the plausibility of the tale, where it did not destroy plausibility altogether. This is particularly true of science fiction. In a series of articles on the "science" in science fiction, Dr. Richard Macklin noted such things as the fact that if you can find some way of bending light waves around you, you will indeed be invisible — but you'll also be blind! And if you're going to have a device which permits you to walk through walls, then the reader should be told why you do not also fall through floors! But this issue of secondary implications also applies to weird and horror fiction, too, and John W. Campbell's justly famous magazine **Unknown** was the place where attention to such matters was demanded most strictly. The results were often wildly hilarious. However, Campbell did not originate this approach to magic and the "supernatural," as you will see in this tale which appeared in the collection, **Twelve Stories And A Dream**, in 1897.

HE SITS NOT a dozen yards away. If I glance over my shoulder I can see him. And if I

catch his eye — and usually I catch his eye — it meets me with an expression . . .

It is mainly an imploring look — and yet with suspicion in it.

Confound his suspicion! If I wanted to tell on him I should have told long ago. I don't tell and I don't tell, and he ought to feel at his ease. As if anything so gross and fat as he could feel at ease! Who would believe me if I did tell?

Poor old Pyecraft! Great, uneasy jelly of substance! The fattest clubman in London.

He sits at one of the little club tables in the huge bay by the fire, stuffing. What is he stuffing? I glance judiciously and catch him biting at a round of hot buttered tea-cake, with his eyes on me. Confound him! — with his eyes on me!

That settles it, Pyecraft! Since you *will* be abject, since you *will* behave as though I was not a man of honor, here, right under your embedded eyes, I write the thing down — the plain truth about Pyecraft. The man I helped, the man I shielded, and who has requited me by making my club unendurable, with his liquid appeal, with the perpetual "don't tell" of his looks.

And, besides, why does he keep on eternally eating?

Well, here goes for the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!

Pyecraft . . . I made the acquaintance of Pyecraft in this very smoking-room. I was a young, nervous new member, and he saw it. I was sitting all

alone, wishing I knew more of the members, and suddenly he came, a great rolling front of chins and abdomina, towards me, and grunted and sat down in a chair close by me and wheezed for a space, and scraped for a space with a match and lit a cigar, and then addressed me. I forget what he said — something about the matches not lighting properly, and afterwards as he talked he kept stopping the waiters one by one as they went by, and telling them about the matches in that thin, fluty voice he has. But anyhow, it was in some way we began our talking.

He talked about various things and came round to games. And thence to my figure and complexion. "You ought to be a good cricketer," he said. I suppose I am slender, slender to what some people would call lean, and I suppose I am rather dark, still — I am not ashamed of having a Hindu great-grandmother, but, for all that, I don't want casual strangers to see through me at a glance to *her*. So that I was set against Pyecraft from the beginning.

But he only talked about me in order to get to himself.

"I expect," he said, "you take no more exercise than I do, and probably you eat no less." (Like all excessively obese people he fancied he ate nothing.) "Yet" — and he smiled an oblique smile — "we differ."

And then he began to talk about his fatness and his fatness; all he did for his fatness and all he was going to do for his fatness; what people had advised him to do for his fatness and what he had heard of people doing for fatness similar to his. "A priori," he said, "one would think a question of nutrition could be answered by drugs." It was stifling. It was dumpling talk. It made me feel swelled to hear him.

ONE STANDS that sort of thing once in a while at a club, but a time came when I fancied I was standing too much. He took me altogether too conspicuously. I could never go into the smoking-room but he would come wallowing towards me, and sometimes he came and gormandised round and about me while I had my lunch. He seemed at times almost to be clinging to me. He was a bore, but not so fearful a bore as to be limited to me; and from the first there was something in his manner — almost as though he knew, almost as though he penetrated to the fact that I *might* — that there was a remote, exceptional chance in me that no else presented.

"I'd give anything to get it down," he would say — "anything," and peer at me over his vast cheeks and pant.

Poor old Pyecraft! He had just

gonged, no doubt to order another buttered tea-cake!

He came to the actual thing one day. "Our Pharmacopoeia," he said, "our Western Pharmacopoeia, is anything but the last word of medical science. In the East, I've been told . . ."

He stopped and stared at me. It was like being at an aquarium.

I was quite suddenly angry with him. "Look here," I said, "who told you about my great-grandmother's recipes?"

"Well," he fenced.

"Every time we've met for a week," I said — "and we've met pretty often — you've given me a broad hint or so about that little secret of mine."

"Well," he said, "now the cat's out of the bag, I'll admit, yes, it is so, I had it . . ."

"From Pattison?"

"Indirectly," he said, which I believe was lying, "yes."

"Pattison," I said, "took that stuff at his own risk."

He pursed his mouth and bowed.

"My great-grandmother's recipes," I said, "are queer things to handle. My father was near making me promise . . ."

"He didn't?"

"No. But he warned me. He himself used one — once."

"Ah! . . . But do you think — ? Suppose — suppose there did happen to be one . . ."

"The things are curious docu-

ments," I said. "Even the smell of 'em . . . Nol"

But after going so far Pyecraft was resolved I should go farther. I was always a little afraid if I tried his patience too much he would fall on me suddenly and smother me. I own I was weak. But I was also annoyed with Pyecraft. I had got to the state of feeling for him that disposed me to say, "Well, *take* the risk!" The little affair of Pattison to which I have alluded was a different matter altogether. What it was doesn't concern us now, but I knew, anyhow, that the particular recipe I used then was safe. The rest I didn't know so much about, and, on the whole, I was inclined to doubt their safety pretty completely.

Yet even if Pyecraft got poisoned . . .

I must confess the poisoning of Pyecraft struck me as an immense undertaking.

THAT EVENING I took that queer, odd-scented sandal-wood box out of my safe and turned the rustling skins over. The gentleman who wrote the recipes for my great-grandmother evidently had a weakness for skins of a miscellaneous origin, and his handwriting was cramped to the last degree. Some of the things are quite unreadable to me — though my family, with its Indian Civil Service associations, has kept up a knowledge of Hindustani from generation to gen-

eration — and none are absolutely plain sailing. But I found the one that I knew was there soon enough, and sat on the floor by my safe for some time looking at it.

"Look here," said I to Pyecraft next day, and snatched the slip away from his eager grasp.

"So far as I can make it out, this is a recipe for Loss of Weight. ("Ah!" said Pyecraft.) I'm not absolutely sure, but I think it's that. And if you take my advice you'll leave it alone. Because, you know — I blacken my blood in your interest, Pyecraft — my ancestors on that side were, so far as I can gather, a jolly queer lot. See?"

"Let me try it," said Pyecraft.

I leant back in my chair. My imagination made one mighty effort and fell flat within me. "What in Heaven's name, Pyecraft," I asked, "do you think you'll look like when you get thin?"

He was impervious to reason. I made him promise never to say a word to me about his disgusting fatness again whatever happened — never, and then I handed him that little piece of skin.

"It's nasty stuff," I said.

"No matter," he said, and took it.

He goggled at it. "But — but . . ." he said.

He had just discovered that it wasn't English.

"To the best of my ability," I

said, "I will do you a translation."

I did my best. After that we didn't speak for a fortnight. Whenever he approached me I frowned and motioned him away, and he respected our compact, but at the end of a fortnight he was as fat as ever. And then he got a word in.

"I must speak," he said. "It isn't fair. There's something wrong. It's done me no good. You're not doing your great-grandmother justice."

"Where's the recipe?"

He produced it gingerly from his pocket-book.

I ran my eye over the items. "Was the egg addled?" I asked.

"No. Ought it to have been?"

"That," I said, "goes without saying in all my poor dear great-grandmother's recipes. When condition or quality is not specified you must get the worst. She was drastic or nothing . . . And there's one or two possible alternatives to some of these other things. You got *fresh* rattlesnake venom?"

"I got rattle snake from Jamrach's. It cost — it cost . . ."

"That's your affair, anyhow. This last item . . ."

"I know a man who . . ."

"Yes. H'm. Well, I'll write the alternatives down. So far as I know the language, the spelling of this recipe is particularly atrocious. By-the-bye, dog here probably means pariah dog."

FOR A MONTH after that I saw Pyecraft constantly at the club and as fat and anxious as eved. He kept our treaty, but at times he broke the spirit of it by shaking his head despondently. Then one day in the cloakroom he said, "Your great-grandmother . . ."

"Not a word against her," I said; and he held his peace.

I could have fancied he had desisted, and I saw him one day talking to three new members about his fatness as though he was in search of other recipes. And then, quite unexpectedly, his telegram came.

"Mr. Formalyn!" bawled a page-boy under my nose, and I took the telegram and opened it at once.

"For Heaven's sake come — Pyecraft."

"H'm," said I, and to tell the truth I was so pleased at the rehabilitation of my great grandmother's reputation this evidently promised that I made a most excellent lunch.

I got Pyecraft's address from the hall porter. Pyecraft inhabited the upper half of a house in Bloomsbury, and I went there as soon as I had done my coffee and Trappistine. I did not wait to finish my cigar.

"Mr. Pyecraft?" said I, at the front door.

They believed he was ill; he hadn't been out for two days.

"He expects me," said I, and they sent me up.

I rang the bell at the lattice-door upon the landing.

"He shouldn't have tried it, anyhow," I said to myself. "A man who eats like a pig ought to look like a pig."

An obviously worthy woman, with an anxious face and a carelessly placed cap, came and surveyed me through the lattice.

I gave my name and she let me in in a dubious fashion.

"Well?" said I, as we stood together inside Pyecraft's piece of the landing.

"'E said you was to come in if you came," she said, and regarded me, making no motion to show me anywhere. And then, confidentially, "'E's locked in, sir."

"Locked in?"

"Locked himself in yesterday morning and 'asn't let any one in since, sir. And ever and again *swearing*. Oh, my!"

I stared at the door she indicated by her glances. "In there?" I said.

"Yes, sir."

"What's up?"

She shook her head sadly, "'E keeps on calling for vittles, sir. 'Eavy vittles 'e wants. I get 'im what I can. Pork 'e's 'ad, sooit puddin', sossiges, noo bread. Everythink like that. Left outside, if you please, and me go away. 'E's eatin', sir, somethink awful."

There came a piping bawl from inside the door: "That Formalyn?"

"That you, Pyecraft?" I shouted, and went and banged the door.

"Tell her to go away."

I did.

Then I could hear a curious pattering upon the door, almost like some one feeling for the handle in the dark, and Pyecraft's familiar grunts.

"It's all right," I said, "she's gone."

But for a long time the door didn't open.

I heard the key turn. Then Pyecraft's voice said, "Come in."

I turned the handle and opened the door. Naturally I expected to see Precraft.

Well, you know, he wasn't there!

I NEVER HAD such a shock in my life. There was his sitting-room in a state of untidy disorder, plates and dishes among the books and writing things, and several chairs overturned, but Pycraft . . .

"It's all right, o' man; shut the door," he said, and then I discovered him.

There he was right up close to the cornice in the corner by the door, as though some one had glued him to the ceiling. His face was anxious and angry. He panted and gesticulated. "Shut the door," he said. "If that woman gets hold of it . . ."

I shut the door, and went and stood away from him and stared.

"If anything gives way and you tumble down," I said, "you'll break your neck, Pyecraft."

"I wish I could," he wheezed.

"A man of your age and weight getting up to kiddish gymnastics . . ."

"Don't," he said, and looked agonized.

"I'll tell you," he said, and gesticulated.

"How the deuce," said I, "are you holding on up there?"

And then abruptly I realized that he was not holding on at all, that he was floating up there — just as a gas-filled bladder might have floated in the same position. He began a struggle to thrust himself away from the ceiling and to clamber down the wall to me. "It's that prescription," he panted, as he did so. "Your great-gran . . ."

He took hold of a framed engraving rather carelessly as he spoke and it gave way, and he flew back to the ceiling again, while the picture smashed onto the sofa. Bump he went against the ceiling, and I knew then why he was all over white on the more salient curves and angles of his person. He tried again more carefully, coming down by way of the mantel.

It was really a most extraordinary spectacle, that great, fat, apoplectic-looking man upside down and trying to get from the ceiling to the floor. "That prescription," he said. "Too successful."

"How?"

"Loss of weight — almost complete."

And then, of course, I understood.

"By Jove, Pyecraft," said I, "what you wanted was a cure for fatness! But you always called it weight."

Somehow I was extremely delighted. I quite liked Pyecraft for the time. "Let me help you!" I said, and took his hand and pulled him down. He kicked about, trying to get a foothold somewhere. It was very much like holding a flag on a windy day.

"That table," he said, pointing, "is solid mahogany and very heavy. If you can put me under that . . ."

I DID, AND there he wallowed about like a captive balloon, while I stood on his hearthrug and talked to him.

I lit a cigar. "Tell me," I said, "what happened?"

"I took it," he said.

"How did it taste?"

"Oh, *beastly!*"

I should fancy they all did. Whether one regards the ingredients or the probable compound, or the possible results, almost all my great-grandmother's remedies appear, to me at least, to be extraordinarily uninviting. For my own part . . . "I took a little sip first."

"Yes?"

"And I felt lighter and better after an hour. I decided to take the draught."

"My dear Pyecraft!"

"I held my nose," he explained. "And then I kept on getting lighter and lighter — and helpless, you know."

He gave way suddenly to a burst of passion. "What the goodness am I to do?"

"There's one thing pretty evident," I said, "that you mustn't do. If you go out of doors you'll go up and up." I waved an arm upward. "They'd have to send Santos-Dumont after you to bring you down again."

"I suppose it will wear off?"

I shook my head. "I don't think you can count on that," I said.

And then there was another burst of passion, and he kicked out at adjacent chairs and banged the floor. He behaved just as I should have expected a great, fat, self-indulgent man to behave under trying circumstances — that is to say, very badly. He spoke of me and of my great-grandmother with an utter want of discretion.

"I never asked you to take the stuff," I said.

And generously disregarding the insults he was putting upon me, I sat down in his armchair and began to talk to him in a sober, friendly fashion.

I pointed out to him that this was a trouble he had brought upon himself, and that it had al-

most an air of poetical justice. He had eaten too much. This he disputed, and for a time we argued the point.

He became noisy and violent so I desisted from this aspect of his lesson. "And then," said I, "you committed the sin of euphuism. You called it, not Fat, which is just and inglorious, but Weight. You . . ."

He interrupted to say that he recognized all that. What was he to do?

I suggested he should adapt himself to his new conditions. So we came to the really sensible part of the business. I suggested that it would not be difficult for him to learn to walk about on the ceiling with his hands . . .

"I can't sleep," he said.

But that was no great difficulty. It was quite possible, I pointed out, to make a shake-up under a wire mattress, fasten the under things on with tapes, and have a blanket, sheet, and coverlet to button at the side. He would have to confide in his housekeeper, I said; and after some squabbling he agreed to that. (Afterwards it was quite delightful to see the beautifully matter-of-fact way with which the good lady took all these amazing inversions). He could have a library ladder in his room, and all his meals could be laid on the top of his bookcase. We also hit on an ingenious device by which he could get to

the floor whenever he wanted, which was simply to put the *British Encyclopaedia* (tenth edition) on the top of his open shelves. He just pulled out a couple of volumes and held on, and down he came. And we agreed there must be iron staples along the skirting, so that he could cling to those whenever he wanted to get about the room on the lower level.

AS WE GOT on with the thing I found myself almost keenly interested. It was I who called in the housekeeper and broke matters to her, and it was I chiefly who fixed up the inverted bed. In fact, I spent two whole days at his flat. I am a handy, interfering sort of man with a screwdriver, and I made all sorts of ingenious adaptations for him — ran a wire to ring his bells within reach, turned all his electric lights up instead of down, and so on. The whole affair was extremely curious and interesting to me, and it was delightful to think of Precraft like some great, fat blow-fly, crawling about on his ceiling and clambering round the lintels of his doors from one room to another, and never, never, never coming to the club any more . . .

Then, you know, my fatal ingenuity got the better of me. I was sitting by his fire drinking his whisky, and he was up in his favorite corner by the cor-

nice, tacking a Turkey carpet to the ceiling, when the idea struck me. "By Jove, Pyecraft!" I said, "all this is totally unnecessary."

And before I could calculate the complete consequences of my notion I blurted it out. "Lead underclothing," said I, and the mischief was done.

Pyecraft received the thing almost in tears. "To be right ways up again . . ." he said.

I gave him the whole secret before I saw where it would take me. "Buy sheet lead," I said, "stamp it into discs. Sew 'em all over your underclothes until you have enough. Have lead-soled boots, carry a bag of solid lead, and the thing is done! Instead of being a prisoner here you may go abroad again. Pyecraft; you may travel . . ."

A still happier idea came to me. "You need never fear a shipwreck. All you need do is just slip off some or all of your clothes, take the necessary amount of luggage in your hand, and float up in the air . . ."

In his emotion he dropped the tack-hammer within an ace of my head. "By Jove!" he said, "I shall be able to come back to the club again."

The thing pulled me up short. "By Jove!" I said faintly. "Yes. Of course — you will."

He did. He does. There he sits behind me now, stuffing — as I live! — a third go of buttered

tea-cake. And no one in the whole world knows — except his housekeeper and me — that he weighs practically nothing; that he is a mere boring mass of assimilatory matter, mere clouds in clothing, *niente, nefas*, the most inconsiderable of men. There he sits watching until I have done this writing. Then, if he can, he will waylay me. He will come billowing up to me

...

He will tell me over and again all about it, how it feels, how it

doesn't feel, how he sometimes hopes it is passing off a little. And always somewhere in that fat, abundant discourse he will say, "The secret's keeping, eh? If any one knew of it — I should be so ashamed . . . Makes a fellow look such a fool, you know. Crawling about on a ceiling and all that . . ."

And now to elude Pyecraft, occupying, as he does, an admirable strategic position between me and the door.



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The Mark Of The Beast

by Rudyard Kipling

Our thanks to Frances Avery for reminding us of this story, which appeared in the collection entitled **Life's Handicap**. It seems to have been written circa 1890, and the locale, of course, is India.

EAST OF SUEZ, some hold, the direct control of Providence ceases; Man being there handed over to the power of the Gods and Devils of Asia, and the Church of England Providence only exercising an occasional and modified supervision in the case of Englishmen.

This theory accounts for some of the more unnecessary horrors of life in India: it may be stretched to explain my story.

My friend Strickland of the Police, who knows as much of natives of India as is good for any man, can bear witness to the facts of the case. Dumoise, our doctor, also saw what Strickland and I saw. The infer-

ence which he drew from the evidence was entirely incorrect. He is dead now; he died, in a rather curious manner, which has been elsewhere described.

When Fleete came to India, he owned a little money and some land in the Himalayas, near a place called Dharmsala. Both properties had been left him by an uncle, and he came out to finance them. He was a big, heavy, genial, and inoffensive man. His knowledge of natives was, of course, limited, and he complained of the difficulties of the language.

He rode in from his place in the hills to spend New Year in the station, and he stayed with

Strickland. On New Year's Eve there was a big dinner at the club, and the night was excusably wet. When men foregather from the uttermost ends of the Empire, they have a right to be riotous. The Frontier had sent down a contingent o' Catch-'em-Alive-O's who had not seen twenty white faces for a year, and were used to ride fifteen miles to dinner at the next Fort at the risk of a Khyberree bullet where their drinks should lie. They profited by their new security, for they tried to play pool with a curled-up hedgehog found in the garden, and one of them carried the marker round the room in his teeth. Half a dozen planters had come in from the south and were talking "horse" to the Biggest Liar in Asia, who was trying to cap all their stories at once. Everybody was there, and there was a general closing up of ranks and taking stock of our losses in dead or disabled that had fallen during the past year.

It was a very wet night, and I remember that we sang "Auld Lang Syne" with our feet in the Polo Championship Cup, and our heads among the stars, and swore that we were all dear friends. Then some of us went away and annexed Burma, and some tried to open up the Soudan and were opened up by Fuzzies in that cruel scrub outside Suakim, and some found stars and medals, and some

were married, which was bad, and some did other things which were worse, and the others of us stayed in our chains and strove to make money on insufficient experiences.

Fleete began the night with sherry and bitters, drank champagne steadily up to dessert, then raw, rasping Capri with all the strength of whisky, took Benedictine with his coffee, four or five whiskies and sodas to improve his pool strokes, beer and bones at half-past two, winding up with old brandy. Consequently, when he came out, at half-past three in the morning, into fourteen degrees of frost, he was very angry with his horse for coughing, and tried to leapfrog into the saddle. The horse broke away and went to his stables; so Strickland and I formed a Guard of Dishonor to take Fleete home.

OUR ROAD LAY through the bazaar, close to a little temple of Hanuman, the Monkey-god, who is a leading divinity worthy of respect. All gods have good points, just as have all priests. Personally, I attach much importance to Hanuman, and am kind to his people — the great gray apes of the hills. One never knows when one may want a friend.

There was a light in the temple, and as we passed, we could hear voices of men chanting hymns. In a native temple, the

priests rise at all hours of the night to do honor to their god. Before we could stop him, Fleete dashed up the steps, patted two priests on the back, and was gravely grinding the ashes of his cigar-butt into the forehead of the red stone image of Hanuman. Strickland tried to drag him out, but he sat down and said solemnly:

"Shee that? 'Mark of the Beasht! I made it. Isn't it fine?"

In half a minute the temple was alive and noisy, and Strickland, who knew what came of polluting gods, said that things might occur. He, by virtue of his official position, long residence in the country, and weakness for going among the natives, was known to the priests and he felt unhappy. Fleete sat on the ground and refused to move. He said that "good old Hanuman" made a very soft pillow.

Then, without any warning, a Silver Man came out of a recess behind the image of the god. He was perfectly naked in that bitter, bitter cold, and his body shone like frosted silver, for he was what the Bible calls "a leper as white as snow." Also he had no face, because he was a leper of some years' standing and his disease was heavy upon him. We two stooped to haul Fleete up, and the temple was filling and filling with folk who seemed to spring from the earth, when the Silver Man ran in un-

der our arms, making a noise exactly like the mewling of an otter, caught Fleete round the body and dropped his head on Fleete's breast before we could wrench him away. Then he retired to a corner and sat mewling while the crowd blocked all the doors.

The priests were very angry until the Silver Man touched Fleete. That nuzzling seemed to sober them.

At the end of a few minutes' silence one of the priests came to Strickland and said, in perfect English, "Take your friend away. He was done with Hanuman, but Hanuman has not done with him." The crowd gave room and we carried Fleete into the road.

Strickland was very angry. He said that we might all three have been knifed, and that Fleete should thank his stars that he had escaped without injury.

Fleete thanked no one. He said that he wanted to go to bed. He was gorgeously drunk.

We moved on, Strickland silent and wrathful, until Fleete was taken with violent shivering fits and sweating. He said that the smells of the bazaar were overpowering, and he wondered why slaughter-houses were permitted so near English residences. "Can't you smell the blood?" said Fleete.

We put him to bed at last, just as the dawn was breaking,

and Strickland invited me to have another whiskey and soda. While we were drinking he talked of the trouble in the temple, and admitted that it baffled him completely. Strickland hates being mystified by natives, because his business in life is to overmatch them with their own weapons. He has not yet succeeded in doing this, but in fifteen or twenty years he will have made some small progress.

"They should have mauled us," he said, "instead of mewling at us. I wonder what they meant. I don't like it one little bit."

I said that the Managing Committee of the temple would in all probability bring a criminal action against us for insulting their religion. There was a section of the Indian Penal Code which exactly met Fleete's offence. Strickland said he only hoped and prayed that they would do this. Before I left I looked into Fleete's room and saw him lying on his right side, scratching his left breast. Then I went to bed cold, depressed, and unhappy, at seven o'clock in the morning.

AT ONE O'CLOCK I rode over to Strickland's house to inquire after Fleete's head. I imagined that it would be a sore one. Fleete was breakfasting and seemed unwell. His temper was gone, for he was abusing the cook for not sup-

plying him with an underdone chop. A man who can eat raw meat after a wet night is a curiosity. I told Fleete this and he laughed.

"You breed queer mosquitoes in these parts," he said. "I've been bitten to pieces, but only in one place."

"Let's have a look at the bite," said Strickland. "It may have gone down since this morning."

While the chops were being cooked, Fleete opened his shirt and showed us, just over his left breast, a mark, the perfect double of the black rosettes — the five or six irregular blotches arranged in a circle — on a leopard's hide. Strickland looked and said, "It was only pink this morning. It's grown black now."

Fleete ran to a glass.

"By Jove!" he said, "this is nasty. What is it?"

We could not answer. Here the chops came in, all red and juicy, and Fleete bolted three in a most offensive manner. He ate on his right grinders only, and threw his head over his right shoulder as he snapped the meat. When he had finished, it struck him that he had been behaving strangely, for he said apologetically, "I don't think I ever felt so hungry in my life. I've bolted like an ostrich."

After breakfast Strickland said to me, "Don't go. Stay here, and stay for the night."

Seeing that my house was not

three miles from Strickland's, this request was absurd. But Strickland insisted, and was going to say something when Fleete interrupted by declaring in a shamefaced way that he felt hungry again. Strickland sent a man to my house to fetch over my bedding and a horse, and we three went down to Strickland's stables to pass the hours until it was time to go out for a ride. The man who has a weakness for horses never wearies of inspecting them; and when two men are killing time in this way they gather knowledge and lies the one from the other.

There were five horses in the stables, and I shall never forget the scene as we tried to look them over. They seemed to have gone mad. They reared and screamed and nearly tore up their pickets; they sweated and shivered and lathered and were distraught with fear. Strickland's horses used to know him as well as his dogs; which made the matter more curious. We left the stable for fear of the brutes throwing themselves in their panic. Then Strickland turned back and called me. The horses were still frightened, but they let us "gentle" and make much of them, and put their heads in our bosoms.

"They aren't afraid of us," said Strickland. "D'you know,

I'd give three months' pay if *Outrage* here could talk."

But *Outrage* was dumb, and could only cuddle up to his master and blow out his nostrils, as is the custom of horses when they wish to explain things but can't. Fleete came up when we were in the stalls, and as soon as the horses saw him, their fright broke out afresh. It was all that we could do to escape from the place unkicked. Strickland said, "They don't seem to love you, Fleete."

"Nonsense," said Fleete; "my mare will follow me like a dog." He went to her; she was in a loose-box; but as he slipped the bars she plunged, knocked him down, and broke away into the garden. I laughed, but Strickland was not amused. He took his moustache in both fists and pulled at it till it nearly came out. Fleete, instead of going off to chase his property, yawned, saying that he felt sleepy. He went to the house to lie down, which was a foolish way of spending New Year's Day.

Strickland sat with me in the stables and asked if I had noticed anything peculiar in Fleete's manner. I said that he ate his food like a beast; but that this might have been the result of living alone in the hills out of the reach of society as refined and elevating as ours for instance. Strickland was not amused. I do not think that he listened to me, for his next sen-

tence referred to the mark on Fleete's breast, and I said that it might have been caused by blister-flies, or that it was possibly a birth-mark newly born and now visible for the first time. We both agreed that it was unpleasant to look at, and Strickland found occasion to say that I was a fool.

"I can't tell you what I think now," said he, "because you would call me a madman; but you must stay with me for the next few days, if you can. I want you to watch Fleete, but don't tell me what you think till I have made up my mind."

"But I am dining out to-night," I said.

"So am I," said Strickland, "and so is Fleete. At least if he doesn't change his mind."

WE WALKED ABOUT the garden smoking, but saying nothing — because we were friends, and talking spoils good tobacco — till our pipes were out. Then we went to wake up Fleete. He was wide awake and fidgeting about his room.

"I say, I want some more chops," he said. "Can I get them?"

We laughed and said, "Go and change. The ponies will be round in a minute."

"All right," said Fleete. "I'll go when I get the chops — underdone ones, mind."

He seemed to be quite in earnest. It was four o'clock, and

we had had breakfast at one; still, for a long time, he demanded those underdone chops. Then he changed into riding clothes and went out into the verandah. His pony — the mare had not been caught — would not let him come near. All three horses were unmanageable — mad with fear — and finally Fleete said that he would stay at home and get something to eat. Strickland and I rode out wondering. As we passed the temple of Hanuman, the Silver Man came out and mewed at us.

"He is not one of the regular priests of the temple," said Strickland. "I think I should peculiarly like to lay my hands on him."

There was no spring in our gallop on the racecourse that evening. The horses were stale, and moved as though they had been ridden out.

"The fright after breakfast has been too much for them," said Strickland.

That was the only remark he made through the remainder of the ride. Once or twice I think he swore to himself; but that did not count.

We came back in the dark at seven o'clock, and saw that there were no lights in the bungalow. "Careless ruffians my servants are!" said Strickland.

My horse reared at something on the carriage drive, and

Fleete stood up under its nose.

"What are you doing, groveling about the garden?" said Strickland.

But both horses bolted and nearly threw us. We dismounted by the stables and returned to Fleete, who was on his hands and knees under the orange-bushes.

"What the devil's wrong with you?" said Strickland.

"Nothing, nothing in the world," said Fleete, speaking very quickly and thickly. "I've been gardening — botanizing you know. The smell of the earth is delightful. I think I'm going for a walk — a long walk — all night."

Then I saw that there was something excessively out of order somewhere, and I said to Strickland, "I am not dining out."

"Bless you!" said Strickland. "Here, Fleete, get up. You'll catch fever there. Come in to dinner and let's have the lamps lit. We'll all dine at home."

Fleete stood up unwillingly, and said, "No lamps — no lamps. It's much nicer here. Let's dine outside and have some more chops — lots of 'em and underdone — bloody ones with gristle."

Now a December evening in Northern India is bitterly cold, and Fleete's suggestion was that of a maniac.

"Come in," said Strickland sternly. "Come in at once."

Fleete came, and when the lamps were brought, we saw that he was literally plastered with dirt from head to foot. He must have been rolling in the garden. He shrank from the light and went to his room. His eyes were horrible to look at. There was a green light behind them, not in them, if you understand, and the man's lower lip hung down.

Strickland said, "There is going to be trouble — big trouble — tonight. Don't you change your riding-things."

WE WAITED AND waited for Fleete's reappearance, and ordered dinner in the meantime. We could hear him moving about his own room, but there was no light there. Presently from the room came the long-drawn howl of a wolf.

People write and talk lightly of blood running cold and hair standing up and things of that kind. Both sensations are too horrible to be trifled with. My heart stopped as though a knife had been driven through it, and Strickland turned white as the tablecloth.

The howl was repeated, and was answered by another howl far across the fields.

That set the gilded roof on the horror. Strickland dashed into Fleete's room. I followed, and we saw Fleete getting out of the window. He made beast-noises in the back of his throat.

He could not answer us when we shouted at him. He spat.

I don't quite remember what followed, but I think that Strickland must have stunned him with the long boot-jack or else I should never have been able to sit on his chest, Fleete could not speak, he could only snarl, and his snarls were those of a wolf, not of a man. The human spirit must have been giving way all day and have died out with the twilight. We were dealing with a beast that had once been Fleete.

The affair was beyond any human and rational experience. I tried to say "Hydrophobia," but the word wouldn't come, because I knew that I was lying.

We bound this beast with leather thongs of the punkah-rope, and tied its thumbs and big toes together, and gagged it with a shoe-horn, which makes a very efficient gag if you know how to arrange it. Then we carried it into the dining-room, and sent a man to Dumoise, the doctor, telling him to come over at once. After we had despatched the messenger and were drawing breath, Strickland said, "It's no good. This isn't any doctor's work." I also, knew that he spoke the truth.

The beast's head was free, and it threw it about from side to side. Any one entering the room would have believed that

we were curing a wolf's pelt. That was the most loathsome accessory of all.

Strickland sat with his chin in the heel of his fist, watching the beast as it wriggled on the ground, but saying nothing. The shirt had been torn open in the scuffle and showed the black rosette mark on the left breast. It stood out like a blister.

In the silence of the watching we heard something without mewing like a she-otter. We both rose to our feet, and, I answer for myself, not Strickland, felt sick — actually and physically sick. We told each other, as did the men in *Pinafore*, that it was the cat.

Dumoise arrived, and I never saw a little man so unprofessionally shocked. He said that it was a heartrending case of hydrophobia, and that nothing could be done. At least any palliative measures would only prolong the agony. The beast was foaming at the mouth. Fleete, as we told Dumoise, had been bitten by dogs once or twice. Any man who keeps half a dozen terriers must expect a nip now and again. Dumoise could offer no help. He could only certify that Fleete was dying of hydrophobia. The beast was then howling, for it had managed to spit out the shoe-horn. Dumoise said that he would be ready to certify to the cause of death, and that the end was

certain. He was a good little man, and he offered to remain with us; but Strickland refused the kindness. He did not wish to poison Dumoise's New Year. He would only ask him not to give the real cause of Fleete's death to the public.

So Dumoise left, deeply agitated: and as soon as the noise of the cartwheels had died away, Strickland told me, in a whisper, his suspicions. They were so wildly improbable that he dared not say them out aloud; and I, who entertained all Strickland's beliefs, was so ashamed of owning to them that I pretended to disbelieve.

"Even if the Silver Man had bewitched Fleete for polluting the image of Hanuman, the punishment could not have fallen so quickly."

As I was whispering this the cry outside the house rose again, and the beast fell into a fresh paroxysm of struggling till we were afraid that the thongs that held it would give way.

"Watch!" said Strickland. "If this happens six times I shall take the law into my own hands. I order you to help me."

HE WENT INTO his room and came out in a few minutes with the barrels of an old shotgun, a piece of fishing-line, some thick cord, and his heavy wooden bedstead. I reported that the convulsions had fol-

lowed the cry by two seconds in each case, and the beast seemed perceptibly weaker.

Strickland muttered, "But he can't take away the life! He can't take away the life!"

I said, though I knew that I was arguing against myself, "It may be a cat. It must be a cat. If the Silver Man is responsible, why does he dare to come here?"

Strickland arranged the wood on the hearth, put the gun-barrels into the glow of the fire, spread the twine on the table and broke a walking stick in two. There was one yard of fishing line, gut, lapped with wire, such as is used for *mah-seer*-fishing, and he tied the two ends together in a loop.

Then he said, "How can we catch him? He must be taken alive and unhurt."

I said that we must trust in Providence, and go out softly, with polo-sticks into the shrubbery at the front of the house. The man or animal that made the cry was evidently moving round the house as regularly as a night watchman. We could wait in the bushes till he came by and knock him over.

Strickland accepted this suggestion, and we slipped out from a bathroom window into the front verandah and then across the carriage drive into the bushes.

In the moonlight we could see the leper coming round the

corner of the house. He was perfectly naked, and from time to time he mewed and stopped to dance with his shadow. It was an unattractive sight, and thinking of poor Fleete, brought to such degradation by so foul a creature, I put away all my doubts and resolved to help Strickland from the heated gun-barrels to the loop of twine — from the loins to the head and back again — with all tortures that might be needful.

The leper halted in the front porch for a moment and we jumped out on him with the sticks. He was wonderfully strong, and we were afraid that he might escape or be fatally injured before we caught him. We had an idea that lepers were frail creatures, but this proved to be incorrect. Strickland knocked his legs from under him and I put my foot on his neck. He mewed hideously, and even through my riding-boots I could feel that his flesh was not the flesh of a clean man.

He struck at us with his hand and feet-stumps. We looped the lash of a dog-whip round him, under the armpits, and dragged him backwards into the hall and so into the dining-room where the beast lay. There we tied him with trunk-straps. He made no attempt to escape, but mewed.

When we confronted him with the beast the scene was beyond description. The beast

doubled backwards into a bow as though he had been poisoned with strychnine, and moaned in the most pitiable fashion. Several other things happened also, but they cannot be put down here.

"I think I was right," said Strickland. "Now we will ask him to cure this case."

But the leper only mewed. Strickland wrapped a towel round his hand and took the gun-barrels out of the fire. I put the half of the broken walking stick through the loop of fishing-line and buckled the leper comfortably to Strickland's bedstead. I understood then how men and women and little children can endure to see a witch burnt alive; for the beast was moaning on the floor, and though the Silver Man had no face, you could see horrible feelings passing through the slab that took its place, exactly as waves of heat play across red-hot iron — gun-barrels for instance.

Strickland shaded his eyes with his hands for a moment and we got to work. This part is not to be printed.

THE DAWN WAS beginning to break when the leper spoke. His mewings had not been satisfactory up to that point. The beast had fainted from exhaustion and the house was very still. We unstrapped the leper and told him to take

away the evil spirit. He crawled to the beast and laid his hand upon the left breast. That was all. Then he fell face down and whined, drawing in his breath as he did so.

We watched the face of the beast, and saw the soul of Fleete coming back into the eyes. Then a sweat broke out on the forehead and the eyes — they were human eyes — closed. We waited for an hour but Fleete still slept. We carried him to his room and bade the leper go, giving him the bedstead, and the sheet on the bedstead to cover his nakedness, the gloves and the towels with which we had touched him, and the whip that had been hooked round his body. He put the sheet about him and went out into the early morning without speaking or mewing.

Strickland wiped his face and sat down. A night-gong, far away in the city, made seven o'clock.

"Exactly four-and-twenty hours!" said Strickland. "And I've done enough to ensure my dismissal from the service, besides permanent quarters in a lunatic asylum. Do you believe that we are awake?"

The red-hot gun-barrel had fallen on the floor and was singeing the carpet. The smell was entirely real.

That morning at eleven we two together went to wake up Fleete. We looked and saw that

the black leopard-rosette on his chest had disappeared. He was very drowsy and tired, but as soon as he saw us, he said, "Oh! Confound you fellows. Happy New Year to you. Never mix your liquors. I'm nearly dead."

"Thanks for your kindness, but you're over time," said Strickland. "Today is the morning of the second. You've slept the clock round with a vengeance."

The door opened, and little Dumoise put his head in. He had come on foot, and fancied that we were laying out Fleete.

"I've brought a nurse," said Dumoise. "I suppose that she can come in for . . . what is necessary."

"By all means," said Fleete cheerily, sitting up in bed. "Bring on your nurses."

Dumoise was dumb. Strickland led him out and explained that there must have been a mistake in the diagnosis. Dumoise remained dumb and left the house hastily. He considered that his professional reputation had been injured, and was inclined to make a personal matter of the recovery. Strickland went out too. When he came back, he said that he had been to call on the Temple of Hanuman to offer redress for the pollution of the god, and had been solemnly assured that no white man had ever touched the idol and that he was an incarnation of all the virtues laboring under

a delusion. "What do you think?" said Strickland.

I said, "There are more things . . ."

But Strickland hates that quotation. He says that I have worn it threadbare.

One other curious thing happened which frightened me as much as anything in all the night's work. When Fleete was dressed he came into the dining-room and sniffed. He had a quaint trick of moving his nose when he sniffed. "Horrid doggy smell, here," said he. "You should really keep those terriers of yours in better order. Try sulphur, Strick."

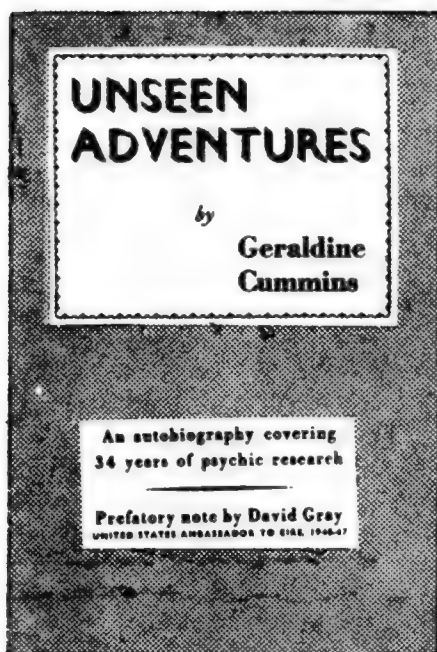
But Strickland did not answer. He caught hold of the back of a chair, and, without warning, went into an amazing fit of hysterics. It is terrible to see a strong man overtaken with hysteria. Then it struck me that we had fought for Fleete's soul

with the Silver Man in that room, and had disgraced ourselves as Englishmen for ever, and I laughed and gasped and gurgled just as shamefully as Strickland, while Fleete thought that we had both gone mad. We never told him what we had done.

Some years later, when Strickland had married and was a churchgoing member of society for his wife's sake, we reviewed the incident dispassionately, and Strickland suggested that I should put it before the public.

I cannot myself see that this step is likely to clear up the mystery; because, in the first place, no one will believe a rather unpleasant story, and, in the second, it is well known to every rightminded man that the gods of the heathen are stone and brass, and any attempt to deal with them otherwise is justly condemned.





Miss Cummins, the well-known novelist and playwright, makes it clear that she has always been extremely critical of all spirit messages, carefully weighing each one with the thoroughness of a scientific investigator.

A Partial List of the Contents

The story of the Stone of Destiny; My first seance in Paris, June 1914 — A correct prophecy concerning the First World War; Instances of Precognition or Prophecy; Telepathic experiments in Dublin; Psy-

chometry (or object reading); Prophetic dreams; Psychic work with E. B. Gibbes; The science of identification; Ghosts helpful and harmful; Paranormal Psychology.

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The Dreams In The Witch-House

by H. P. Lovecraft

WHETHER THE dreams brought on the fever or the fever brought on the dreams Walter Gilman did not know. Behind everything crouched the brooding, festering horror of the ancient town, and of the moldy, unhallowed garret gable where he wrote and studied and wrestled with figures and formulae when he was not tossing on the meager iron bed. His ears were growing sensitive to a preternatural and intolerable degree, and he had long ago stoppel the cheap mantel clock whose ticking had come to seem like a thunder of artillery. At night the subtle stirring of the black city outside, the sinister scurrying of

rats in the wormy partitions, and the creaking of hidden timbers in the centuried house, were enough to give him a sense of strident pandemonium. The darkness always teemed with unexplained sound — and yet he sometimes shook with fear lest the noises he heard should subside and allow him to hear certain other, fainter noises which he suspected were lurking behind them.

He was in the changeless, legend-haunted city of Arkham, with its clustering gambrel roofs that sway and sag over attics where witches hid from the King's men in the dark, olden days of the Province. Nor was

Copyright 1933 by Popular Fiction Publishing Company. Copyright 1939
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It is very difficult to arrive at a just estimate of H. P. Lovecraft (1890-1937), as he has gone through both periods of over-estimation and under-estimation — and sometimes for the wrong reasons in each instance. Idolized by the readers of **Weird Tales** during the 20s and 30s, rejected by many of the readers of **Astounding Stories** during the regime of F. Orlin Tremaine, and widely rejected by the Campellian science fictionists in the 40s and 50s, Lovecraft is becoming known to a far wider public through soft-cover collections of his stories, and recorded readings. Sam Moskowitz quite accurately notes, in his chapter on HPL in the book referred to previously, that despite the fact that most of Lovecraft's commercially published fiction appeared in **Weird Tales**, he was really a science fictionist once he got beyond his "Dunsany" period. Only one Lovecraft story can be considered a "ghost" or "supernatural" tale, after this point. Lovecraft's thorough materialistic beliefs led him to combine elements of horror, psychology, mythology (both real mythology and the pseudo-mythology of fictioneers), etc, with the most rigidly based, however fantastic-sounding, scientific and mathematical speculation about the nature of the universe — one which leaves no room for anything "supernatural" at all. Although this story appeared in 1933, it is impossible for your editor to estimate when it was written, although the indefatigable August Derleth may have noted the approximate date somewhere in his many writings, or collections of writings, about HPL. One can tell very little from the date of publication in a magazine, particularly **Weird Tales**, whose editor (in the 30s) at least) often held stories as long as two years before he managed to get them into print. In Lovecraft's case, there is an additional difficulty: HPL detested the typing process, and it was not unusual for a long story, written out in his miniscule script, to lie around for years, while shorter stories were drafted, typed and submitted. A reliable chronology of HPL's fiction is something to hope for, and perhaps Mr. Derleth can give it to us in some future release from Arkham House.

any spot in that city more steeped in macabre memory than the gable room which harbored him — for it was this house and this room which had likewise harbored old Keziah Mason,

whose flight from Salem Jail at the last no one was ever able to explain. That was in 1692 — the jailer had gone mad and babbled of a small white-fanged furry thing which scuttled out

of Keziah's cell, and not even Cotton Mather could explain the curves and angles smeared on the gray stone walls with some red, sticky fluid.

Possibly Gilman ought not to have studied so hard. Non-Eculidean calculus and quantum physics are enough to stretch any brain; and when one mixes them with folklore, and tries to trace a strange background of multi-dimensional reality behind the ghoulish hints of the Gothic tales and the wild whispers of the chimney-corner, one can hardly expect to be wholly free from mental tension. Gilman came from Haverhill, but it was only after he had entered college in Arkham that he began to connect his mathematics with the fantastic legends of elder magic. Something in the air of the hoary town worked obscurely on his imagination. The professors at Miskatonic had urged him to slacken up, and had voluntarily cut down his course at several points. Moreover, they had stopped him from consulting the dubious old books on forbidden secrets that were kept under lock and key in a vault at the university library. But all these precautions came late in the day, so that Gilman had some terrible hints from the dreaded *Necronomicon* of Abdul Alhazred, the fragmentary *Book of Eibon*, and the suppressed *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* of von Junzt to correlate

with his abstract formulae on the properties of space and the linkage of dimensions known and unknown.

He knew his room was in the old Witch-House — that, indeed, was why he had taken it. There was much in the Essex County records about Keziah Mason's trial, and what she had admitted under pressure to the Court of Oyer and Terminer had fascinated Gilman beyond all reason. She had told Judge Hathorne of lines and curves that could be made to point out directions leading through the walls of space to other spaces beyond, and had implied that such lines and curves were frequently used at certain midnight meetings in the dark valley of the white stone beyond Meadow Hill and on the unpeopled island in the river. She had spoken also of the Black Man, of her oath, and of her new secret name of Nahab. Then she had drawn those devices on the walls of her cell and vanished.

GILMAN BELIEVED strange things about Keziah, and had felt a queer thrill on learning that her dwelling was still standing after more than 235 years. When he heard the hushed Arkham whispers about Keziah's persistent presence in the old house and the narrow streets, about the irregular human toothmarks left on certain sleepers in that and other houses, about

the childish cries heard near May-Eve and Hallowmass, about the stench often noted in the old house's attic just after those dreaded seasons, and about the small, furry, sharp-toothed thing which haunted the moldering structure and the town and nuzzled people curiously in the black hours before dawn, he resolved to live in the place at any cost. A room was easy to secure; for the house was unpopular, hard to rent, and long given over to cheap lodgings. Gilman could not have told what he expected to find there, but he knew he wanted to be in the building where some circumstance had more or less suddenly given a mediocre old woman of the seventeenth century an insight into mathematical depths perhaps beyond the utmost modern delvings of Planck, Heisenberg, Einstein, and de Sitter.

He studied the timber and plaster walls for traces of cryptic designs at every accessible spot where the paper had peeled, and within a week managed to get the eastern attic room where Keziah was held to have practised her spells. It had been vacant from the first — for no one had ever been willing to stay there long — but the Polish landlord had grown wary about renting it. Yet nothing whatever happened to Gilman till about the time of the fever. No ghostly Keziah flitted through the som-

ber halls and chambers, no small furry thing crept into his dismal eyrie to nuzzle him, and no record of the witch's incantations rewarded his constant search. Sometimes he would take walks through shadowy tangles of unpaved musty-smelling lanes where eldritch brown houses of unknown age leaned and tottered and leered mockingly through narrow, small-paned windows. Here he knew strange things had happened once, and there was a faint suggestion behind the surface that everything of that monstrous past might not — at least in the darkest, narrowest, and most intricately crooked alleys — have utterly perished. He also rowed out twice to the ill-regarded island in the river, and made a sketch of the singular angles described by the moss-grown rows of gray standing stones whose origin was so obscure and immemorial.

GILMAN'S room was of good size but queerly irregular shape; the north wall slanting perceptibly inward from the outer to the inner end, while the low ceiling slanted gently downward in the same direction. Aside from an obvious rat-hole and the signs of other stopped-up ones, there was no access — nor any appearance of a former avenue of access — to the space which must have existed between the slanting wall and the

straight outer wall on the house's north side, though a view from the exterior showed where a window had been boarded up at a very remote date. The loft above the ceiling — which must have had a slanting floor — was likewise inaccessible. When Gilman climbed up a ladder to the cob-webbed level loft above the rest of the attic he found vestiges of a bygone aperture tightly and heavily covered with ancient planking and secured by the stout wooden pegs common in Colonial carpentry. No amount of persuasion, however, could induce the stolid landlord to let him investigate either of these two closed spaces.

As time wore along, his absorption in the irregular wall and ceiling of his room increased; for he began to read into the odd angles a mathematical significance which seemed to offer vague clues regarding their purpose. Old Keziah, he reflected, might have had excellent reasons for living in a room with peculiar angles; for was it not through certain angles that she claimed to have gone outside the boundaries of the world of space we know? His interest gradually veered away from the unplumbed voids beyond the slanting surfaces, since it now appeared that the purpose of those surfaces concerned the side he was already on.

The touch of brain-fever and the dreams began early in Feb-

ruary. For some time, apparently, the curious angles of Gilman's room had been having a strange, almost hypnotic effect on him; and as the bleak winter advanced he had found himself staring more and more intently at the corner where the down-slanting ceiling met the inward-slanting wall. About this period his inability to concentrate on his formal studies worried him considerably, his apprehensions about the mid-year examinations being very acute. But the exaggerated sense of hearing was scarcely less annoying. Life had become an insistent and almost unendurable cacophony, and there was that constant, terrifying impression of *other* sounds — perhaps from regions beyond life — trembling on the very brink of audibility. So far as concrete noises went, the rats in the ancient partitions were the worst. Sometimes their scratching seemed not only furtive but deliberate. When it came from beyond the slanting north wall it was mixed with a sort of dry rattling; and when it came from the century-closed loft above the slanting ceiling Gilman always braced himself as if expecting some horror which only bided its time before descending to engulf him utterly.

THE DREAMS WERE wholly beyond the pale of sanity, and Gilman felt that they

must be a result, jointly, of his studies in mathematics and in folklore. He had been thinking too much about the vague regions which his formulae told him must lie beyond the three dimensions we know, and about the possibility that old Keziah Mason — guided by some influence past all conjecture — had actually found the gate to those regions. The yellowed county records containing her testimony and that of her accusers were so damnably suggestive of things beyond human experience — and the descriptions of the darting little furry object which served as her familiar were so painfully realistic despite their incredible details.

That object — no larger than a good-sized rat and quaintly called by the townspeople "Brown Jenkin" — seemed to have been the fruit of a remarkable case of sympathetic herd-delusion, for in 1692 no less than eleven persons had testified to glimpsing it. There were recent rumors, too, with a baffling and disconcerting amount of agreement. Witnesses said it had long hair and the shape of a rat, but that its sharp-toothed, bearded face was evilly human while its paws were like tiny human hands. It took messages betwixt old Keziah and the devil, and was nursed on the witch's blood, which it sucked like a vampire. Its voice was a kind of loathsome titter, and it could speak

all languages. Of all the bizarre monstrosities in Gilman's dreams, nothing filled him with greater panic and nausea than this blasphemous and diminutive hybrid, whose image flitted across his vision in a form a thousandfold more hateful than anything his waking mind had deduced from the ancient records and the modern whispers.

Gilman's dreams consisted largely in plunges through limitless abysses of inexplicably colored twilight and bafflingly disordered sound; abysses whose material and gravitational properties, and whose relation to his own entity, he could not even begin to explain. He did not walk or climb, fly or swim, crawl or wriggle; yet always experienced a mode of motion partly voluntary and partly involuntary. Of his own condition he could not well judge, for sight of his arms, legs, and torso seemed always cut off by some odd disarrangement of perspective; but he felt that his physical organization and faculties were somehow marvelously transmuted and obliquely projected — though not without a certain grotesque relationship to his normal proportions and properties.

The abysses were by no means vacant, being crowded with indescribably angled masses of alien-hued substance, some of which appeared to be organic while others seemed inorganic.

A few of the organic objects tended to awake vague memories in the back of his mind, though he could form no conscious idea of what they mockingly resembled or suggested. In the later dreams he began to distinguish separate categories into which the organic objects appeared to be divided, and which seemed to involve in each case a radically different species of conduct-pattern and basic motivation. Of these categories one seemed to him to include objects slightly less illogical and irrelevant in their motions than the members of the other categories.

ALL THE OBJECTS — organic and inorganic alike — were totally beyond description or even comprehension. Gilman sometimes compared the inorganic matter to prisms, labyrinths, clusters of cubes and planes, and cyclopean buildings; and the organic things struck him variously as groups of bubbles, octopi, centipedes, living Hindu idols, and intricate arabesques roused into a kind of ophidian animation. Everything he saw was unspeakably menacing and horrible; and whenever one of the organic entities appeared by its motions to be noticing him, he felt a stark, hideous fright which generally jolted him awake. Of how the organic entities moved, he could tell no more than of how

he moved himself. In time he observed a further mystery — the tendency of certain entities to appear suddenly out of empty space, or to disappear totally with equal suddenness. The shrieking, roaring confusion of sound which permeated the abysses was past all analysis as to pitch, timbre or rhythm; but seemed to be synchronous with vague visual changes in all the indefinite objects, organic and inorganic alike. Gilman had a constant sense of dread that it might rise to some unbearable degree of intensity during one or another of its obscure, relentlessly inevitable fluctuations.

But it was in these vortices of complete alienage that he saw Brown Jenkin. That shocking little horror was reserved for certain lighter, sharper dreams which assailed him just before he dropped into the fullest depths of sleep. He would be lying in the dark fighting to keep awake when a faint lambent glow would seem to shimmer around the centuried room, showing in a violet mist the convergence of angled planes which had seized his brain so insidiously. The horror would appear to pop out of the rat-hole in the corner and patter toward him over the sagging, wide-planked floor with evil expectancy in its tiny, bearded human face; but mercifully, this dream always melted away before the object got close enough to nuzzle

him. It had hellishly long, sharp, canine teeth. Gilman tried to stop up the rat-hole every day, but each night the real tenants of the partitions would gnaw away the obstruction, whatever it might be. Once he had the landlord nail tin over it, but the next night the rats gnawed a fresh hole, in making which they pushed or dragged out into the room a curious little fragment of bone.

GILMAN DID NOT report his fever to the doctor, for he knew he could not pass the examinations if ordered to the college infirmary when every moment was needed for cramming. As it was, he failed in Calculus D and Advanced General Psychology, thought not without hope of making up lost ground before the end of the term.

It was in March when the fresh element entered his lighter preliminary dreaming, and the nightmare shape of Brown Jenkin began to be companioned by the nebulous blur which grew more and more to resemble a bent old woman. This addition disturbed him more than he could account for, but finally he decided that it was like an ancient crone whom he had twice actually encountered in the dark tangle of lanes near the abandoned wharves. On those occasions the evil, sardonic, and seemingly unmotivated stare of the beldame had set him almost

shivering — especially the first time, when an overgrown rat darting across the shadowed mouth of a neighboring alley had made him think of Brown Jenkin. Now, he reflected, those nervous fears were being mirrored in his disordered dreams.

That the influence of the old house was unwholesome he could not deny, but traces of his early morbid interest still held him there. He argued that the fever alone was responsible for his nightly fantasies, and that when the touch abated he would be free from the monstrous visions. Those visions, however, were of absorbing vividness and convincingness, and whenever he awakened he retained a vague sense of having undergone much more than he remembered. He was hideously sure that in unrecalled dreams he had talked with both Brown Jenkin and the old woman, and that they had been urging him to go somewhere with them and to meet a third being of greater potency.

TOWARD THE end of March he began to pick up his mathematics, though other studies bothered him increasingly. He was getting an intuitive knack for solving Riemannian equations, and astonished Professor Upham by his comprehension of fourth-dimensional and other problems which had floored all the rest of the class. One after-

noon there was a discussion of possible freakish curvatures in space, and of theoretical points of approach or even contact between our part of the cosmos and various other regions as distant as the farthest stars or the trans-galactic gulfs themselves — or even as fabulously remote as the tentatively conceivable cosmic units beyond the whole Einsteinian space-time continuum. Gilman's handling of this theme filled every one with admiration, even though some of his hypothetical illustrations caused an increase in the always plentiful gossip about his nervous and solitary eccentricity. What made the students shake their heads was his sober theory that a man might — given mathematical knowledge admittedly beyond all likelihood of human acquirement — step deliberately from the earth to any other celestial body which might lie at one of an infinity of specific points in the cosmic pattern.

Such a step, he said, would require only two stages; first, a passage out of the three-dimensional sphere we know, and second, a passage back to the three-dimensional sphere at another point, perhaps one of infinite remoteness. That this could be accomplished without loss of life was in many cases conceivable. Any being from any part of three-dimensional space could probably survive in

the fourth dimension; and its survival of the second stage would depend upon what alien part of three-dimensional space it might select for its re-entry. Denizens of some planets might be able to live on certain others — even planets belonging to other space-time continua — though of course there must be vast numbers of mutually uninhabitable even though mathematically juxtaposed bodies or zones of space.

It was also possible that the inhabitants of a given dimensional realm could survive entry to many unknown and incomprehensible realm of additional or indefinitely multiplied dimensions — be they within or outside the given space-time continuum — and that the converse would be likewise true. This was a matter for speculation, though one could be fairly certain that the type of mutation involved in a passage from any given dimensional plane to the next higher plane would not be destructive of biological integrity as we understand it. Gilman could not be very clear about his reasons for this last assumption, but his haziness here was more than overbalanced by his clearness on other complex points. Professor Upham especially liked his demonstration of the kinship of higher mathematics to certain phases of magical lore transmitted down the ages from an ineffable antiquity —

human or pre-human — whose knowledge of the cosmos and its laws was greater than ours.

AROUND THE first of April Gilman worried considerably because his slow fever did not abate. He was also troubled by what some of his fellow-lodgers said about his sleep-walking. It seemed that he was often absent from his bed, and that the creaking of his floor at certain hours of the night was remarked by the man in the room below. This fellow also spoke of hearing the tread of shod feet in the night; but Gilman was sure he must have been mistaken in this, since shoes as well as other apparel were always precisely in place in the morning. One could develop all sorts of aural delusions in this morbid old house — for did not Gilman himself, even in daylight, now feel certain that noises other than rat-scratching came from the black voids beyond the slanting wall and above the slanting ceiling? His pathologically sensitive ears began to listen for faint footfalls in the immemorially sealed loft overhead, and sometimes the illusion of such things was agonizingly realistic.

However, he knew that he had actually become a somnambulist; for twice at night his room had been found vacant, though with all his clothing in place. Of this he had been assured by Frank Elwood, the one

fellow-student whose poverty forced him to room in this squalid and unpopular house. Elwood had been studying in the small hours and had come up for help on a differential equation, only to find Gilman absent. It had been rather presumptuous of him to open the unlocked door after knocking had failed to rouse a response, but he had needed the help very badly and thought that his host would not mind a gentle prodding awake. On neither occasion, though, had Gilman been there; and when told of the matter he wondered where he could have been wandering, barefoot and with only his nightclothes on. He resolved to investigate the matter if reports of his sleep-walking continued, and thought of sprinkling flour on the floor of the corridor to see where his footsteps might lead. The door was the only conceivable egress, for there was no possible foothold outside the narrow window.

AS APRIL advanced, Gilman's fever-sharpened ears were disturbed by the whining prayers of a superstitious loom-fixer named Joe Mazurewicz, who had a room on the ground floor. Mazurewicz had told long, rambling stories about the ghost of old Keziah and the furry, sharp-fanged, nuzzling thing, and had said he was so badly haunted at times that only his silver crucifix — given him for

the purpose by Father Iwanicki of St. Stanislaus' Church — could bring him relief. Now he was praying because the Witches' Sabbath was drawing near. May Eve was Walpurgis Night, when hell's blackest evil roamed the earth and all the slaves of Satan gathered for nameless rites and deeds. It was always a very bad time in Arkham, even though the fine folks up in Miskatonic Avenue and High and Saltonstall Streets pretended to know nothing about it. There would be bad doings, and a child or two would probably be missing. Joe knew about such things, for his grandmother in the old country had heard tales from her grandmother. It was wise to pray and count one's beads at this season. For three months Keziah and Brown Jenkin had not been near Joe's room, nor near Paul Choynski's room, nor anywhere else — and it meant no good when they held off like that. They must be up to something.

Gilman dropped in at the doctor's office on the 16th of the month, and was surprised to find his temperature was not as high as he had feared. The physician questioned him sharply, and advised him to see a nerve specialist. On reflection, he was glad he had not consulted the still more inquisitive college doctor. Old Waldron, who had curtailed his activities before, would have made him take a rest — an

impossible thing now that he was so close to great results in his equations. He was certainly near the boundary between the known universe and the fourth dimension, and who could say how much farther he might go?

But even as these thoughts came to him he wondered at the source of his strange confidence. Did all of this perilous sense of imminence come from the formulae and the sheets he covered day by day? The soft, stealthy, imaginary footsteps in the sealed loft above were unnerving. And now, too, there was a growing feeling that somebody was constantly persuading him to do something terrible which he could not do. How about the somnambulism? Where did he go sometimes in the night? And what was that faint suggestion of sound which once in a while seemed to trickle through the confusion of identifiable sounds even in broad daylight and full wakefulness? Its rhythm did not correspond to anything on earth, unless perhaps to the cadence of one or two unmentionable Sabbath-chants, and sometimes he feared it corresponded to certain attributes of the vague shrieking or roaring in those wholly alien abysses of dream.

THE DREAMS were meanwhile getting to be atrocious. In the lighter preliminary phase the evil old woman was now of fiendish distinctness, and Gil-

man knew she was the one who had frightened him in the slums. Her bent back, long nose, and shrivelled chin were unmistakable, and her shapeless brown garments were like those he remembered. The expression on her face was one of hideous malevolence and exultation, and when he awaked he could recall a croaking voice that persuaded and threatened. He must meet the Black Man, and go with them all to the throne of Azathoth at the center of ultimate chaos. That was what she said. He must sign the book of Azathoth in his own blood and take a new secret name now that his independent delvings had gone so far. What kept him from going with her and Brown Jenkin and the other to the throne of Chaos where the thin flutes pipe mindlessly was the fact that he had seen the name "Azathoth" in the *Necronomicon*, and knew it stood for a primal evil too horrible for description.

The old woman always appeared out of thin air near the corner where the downward slant met the inward slant. She seemed to crystallize at a point closer to the ceiling than to the floor, and every night she was a little nearer and more distinct before the dream shifted. Brown Jenkin, too, was always a little nearer at the last, and his yellowish-white fangs glistened shockingly in that unearthly violet phosphorescence. Its shrill

loathsome tittering stuck more and more in Gilman's head, and he could remember in the morning how it had pronounced the words "Azathoth" and "Nyarlathotep."

In the deeper dreams everything was likewise more distinct, and Gilman felt that the twilight abysses around him were those of the fourth dimension. Those organic entities whose motions seemed least flagrantly irrelevant and unmotivated were probably projections of life-forms from our own planet, including human beings. What the others were in their own dimensional sphere or spheres he dared not try to think. Two of the less irrelevantly moving things — a rather large congeries of iridescent, prolately spheroidal bubbles and a very much smaller polyhedron of unknown colors and rapidly shifting surface angles — seemed to take notice of him and follow him about or float ahead as he changed position among the titan prisms, labyrinths, cube-and-plane clusters and quasi-buildings; and all the while the vague shrieking and roaring waxed louder and louder, as if approaching some monstrous climax of utterly unendurable intensity.

DURING THE night of April 19-20th the new development occurred. Gilman was half involuntarily moving about in the

twilight abysses with the bubble-mass and the small polyhedron floating ahead, when he noticed the peculiarly regular angles formed by the edges of some gigantic neighboring prism-clusters. In another second he was out of the abyss and standing tremulously on a rocky hillside bathed in intense, diffused green light. He was barefooted and in his nightclothes, and when he tried to walk discovered that he could scarcely lift his feet. A swirling vapor hid everything but the immediate sloping terrain from sight, and he shrank from the thought of the sounds that might surge out of that vapor.

Then he saw the two shapes laboriously crawling toward him — the old woman and the little furry thing. The crone strained up to her knees and managed to cross her arms in a singular fashion, while Brown Jenkin pointed in a certain direction with a horribly anthropoid fore-paw which it raised with evident difficulty. Spurred by an impulse he did not originate, Gilman dragged himself forward along a course determined by the angle of the old woman's arms and the direction of the small monstrosity's paw, and before he had shuffled three steps he was back in the twilight abysses. Geometrical shapes seethed around him, and he fell dizzily and interminably. At last he woke in his bed in

the crazily angled garret of the eldritch old house.

He was good for nothing that morning, and stayed away from all his classes. Some unknown attraction was pulling his eyes in a seemingly irrelevant direction, for he could not help staring at a certain vacant spot on the floor. As the day advanced, the focus of his unseeing eyes changed position, and by noon he had conquered the impulse to stare at vacancy. About two o'clock he went out for lunch, and as he threaded the narrow lanes of the city he found himself turning always to the south-east. Only an effort halted him at a cafeteria in Church Street, and after the meal he felt the unknown pull still more strongly.

He would have to consult a nerve specialist after all — perhaps there was a connection with his somnambulism — but meanwhile he might at least try to break the morbid spell himself. Undoubtedly he could still manage to walk away from the pull; so with great resolution he headed against it and dragged himself deliberately north along Garrison Street. By the time he had reached the bridge over the Miskatonic he was in a cold perspiration, and he clutched at the iron railing as he gazed upstream at the ill-regarded island whose regular lines of ancient standing stones brooded sullenly in the afternoon sunlight.

Then he gave a start. For there was a clearly visible living figure on that desolate island, and a second glance told him it was certainly the strange old woman whose sinister aspect had worked itself so disastrously into his dreams. The tall grass near her was moving, too, as if some other living thing were crawling close to the ground. When the old woman began to turn toward him he fled precipitately off the bridge and into the shelter of the town's labyrinthine waterfront alleys. Distant though the island was, he felt that a monstrous and invincible evil could flow from the sardonic stare of that bent, ancient figure in brown.

THE SOUTHEASTWARD pull still held, and only with tremendous resolution could Gilman drag himself into the old house and up the rickety stairs. For hours he sat silent and aimless, with his eyes shifting gradually westward. About six o'clock his sharpened ears caught the prayers of Joe Mazurewicz two floors below, and in desperation he seized his hat and walked out into the sunset-golden streets, letting the now directly southward pull carry him where it might. An hour later darkness found him in the open fields beyond Hangman's Brook, with glimmering spring stars shining ahead. The urge to walk was gradually changing to an urge

to leap mystically into space, and suddenly he realized just where the source of the pull lay.

It was in the sky. A definite point among the stars had a claim on him and was calling him. Apparently it was a point somewhere between Hydra and Argo Navis, and he knew that he had been urged toward it ever since he had awaked soon after dawn. In the morning it had been underfoot, and now it was roughly south but stealing toward the west. What was the meaning of this new thing? Was he going mad? How long would it last? Again mustering his resolution, Gilman turned and dragged himself back to the sinister old house.

MAZUREWICZ WAS waiting for him at the door, and seemed both anxious and reluctant to whisper some fresh bit of superstition. It was about the witch-light. Joe had been out celebrating the night before — it was Patriots' Day in Massachusetts — and had come home after midnight. Looking up at the house from outside, he had thought at first that Gilman's window was dark, but then he had seen the faint violet glow within. He wanted to warn the gentleman about that glow, for everybody in Arkham knew it was Keziah's witch-light which played near Brown Jenkin and the ghost of the old crone her-

self. He had not mentioned this before, but now he must tell about it because it meant that Keziah had her long-toothed familiar were haunting the young gentleman. Sometimes he and Paul Choynski and Landlord Dombrowski thought they saw that light seeping out of cracks in the sealed loft above the young gentleman's room, but they had all agreed not to talk about that. However, it would be better for the gentleman to take another room and get a crucifix from some good priest like Father Iwanicki.

As the man rambled on, Gilman felt a nameless panic clutch at his throat. He knew that Joe must have been half drunk when he came home the night before; yet the mention of a violet light in the garret window was of frightening import. It was a lambent glow of this sort which always played about the old woman and the small furry thing in those lighter, sharper dreams which prefaced his plunge into unknown abysses, and the thought that a wakeful second person could see the dream-luminance was utterly beyond sane harborage. Yet where had the fellow got such an odd notion? Had he himself talked as well as walked around the house in his sleep? No, Joe said, he had not — but he must check up on this. Perhaps Frank Elwood could tell him something, though he hated to ask.

Fever — wild dreams — somnambulism — illusions of sounds — a pull toward a point in the sky — and now a suspicion of sleep-talking! He must stop studying, see a nerve specialist, and take himself in hand. When he climbed to the second story he paused at Elwood's door but saw that the other youth was out. Reluctantly he continued up to his garret room and sat down in the dark. His gaze was still pulled to the southward, but he also found himself listening intently for some sound in the closed loft above, and half imagining that an evil violet light seeped down through an infinitesimal crack in the low, slanting ceiling.

THAT NIGHT AS Gilman slept, the violet light broke upon him with heightened intensity, and the old witch and small furry thing, getting closer than ever before, mocked him with inhuman squeals and devilish gestures. He was glad to sink into the vaguely roaring twilight abysses, though the pursuit of that iridescent bubble-congeries and that kaleidoscopic little polyhedron was menacing and irritating. Then came the shift as vast converging planes of a slippery-looking substance loomed above and below him — a shift which ended in a flash of delirium and a blaze of unknown, alien light in which yellow, carmine, and indigo

were madly and inextricably blended.

He was half lying on a high, fantastically balustraded terrace above a boundless jungle of outlandish, incredible peaks, balanced planes, domes, minarets, horizontal disks poised on pinnacles, and numberless forms of still greater wildness — some of stone and some of metal — which glittered gorgeously in the mixed, almost blistering glare from a polychromatic sky. Looking upward he saw three stupendous disks of flame, each of a different hue, and at a different height above an infinitely distant curving horizon of low mountains. Behind him tiers of higher terraces towered aloft as far as he could see. The city below stretched away to the limits of vision, and he hoped that no sound would well up from it.

The pavement from which he easily raised himself was of a veined, polished stone beyond his power to identify, and the tiles were cut in a bizarre-angled shapes which struck him as less asymmetrical than based on some unearthly symmetry whose laws he could not comprehend. The balustrade was chest-high, delicate, and fantastically wrought, while along the rail were ranged at short intervals little figures of grotesque design and exquisite workmanship. They, like the whole balustrade, seemed to be made of some sort

of shining metal whose color could not be guessed in the chaos of mixed effulgences, and their nature utterly defied conjecture. They represented some ridged barrel-shaped object with thin horizontal arms radiating spoke-like from a central ring and with vertical knobs or bulbs projecting from the head and base of the barrel. Each of these knobs was the hub of a system of five long, flat, triangularly tapering arms arranged around it like the arms of a starfish — nearly horizontal, but curving slightly away from the central barrel. The base of the bottom knob was fused to the long railing with so delicate a point of contact that several figures had been broken off and were missing. The figures were about four and a half inches in height, while the spiky arms gave them a maximum diameter of about two and a half inches.

When Gilman stood up, the tiles felt hot to his bare feet. He was wholly alone, and his first act was to walk to the balustrade and look dizzily down at the endless, cyclopean city almost two thousand feet below. As he listened he thought a rhythmic confusion of faint musical pipings covering a wide tonal range welled up from the narrow streets beneath, and he wished he might discern the denizens of the place. The sight turned him giddy after a while, so that he would have fallen to the pave-

ment had he not clutched instinctively at the lustrous balustrade. His right hand fell on one of the projecting figures, the touch seeming to steady him slightly. It was too much, however, for the exotic delicacy of the metal-work, and the spiky figure snapped off under his grasp. Still half dazed, he continued to clutch it as his other hand seized a vacant space on the smooth railing.

But now his over-sensitive ears caught something behind him, and he looked back across the level terrace. Approaching him softly though without apparent furtiveness were five figures, two of which were the sinister old woman and the fanged, furry little animal. The other three were what sent him unconscious; for they were living entities about eight feet high, shaped precisely like the spiky images on the balustrade, and propelling themselves by a spider-like wriggling of their lower set of starfish-arms.

GILMAN AWAKED in his bed, drenched by a cold perspiration and with a smarting sensation in his face, hands and feet. Springing to the floor, he washed and dressed in frantic haste, as if it were necessary for him to get out of the house as quickly as possible. He did not know where he wished to go, but felt that once more he would have to sacrifice his classes. The

odd pull toward that spot in the sky between Hydra and Argo had abated, but another of even greater strength had taken its place. Now he felt that he must go north — infinitely north. He dreaded to cross the bridge that gave a view of the desolate island in the Miskatonic, so went over the Peabody Avenue bridge. Very often he stumbled, for his eyes and ears were chained to an extremely lofty point in the blank blue sky.

After about an hour he got himself under better control, and saw that he was far from the city. All around him stretched the bleak emptiness of salt marshes, while the narrow road ahead led to Innsmouth — that ancient, half-deserted town which Arkham people were so curiously unwilling to visit. Though the northward pull had not diminished, he resisted it as he had resisted the other pull, and finally found that he could almost balance the one against the other. Plodding back to town and getting some coffee at a soda fountain, he dragged himself into the public library and browsed aimlessly among the lighter magazines. Once he met some friends who remarked how oddly sunburned he looked, but he did not tell them of his walk. At three o'clock he took some lunch at a restaurant, noting meanwhile that the pull had either lessened or divided itself. After that he killed the time at

a cheap cinema show, seeing the inane performance over and over again without paying any attention to it.

About nine at night he drifted homeward and shuffled into the ancient house. Joe Mazurewicz was whining unintelligible prayers, and Gilman hastened up to his own garret chamber without pausing to see if Elwood was in. It was when he turned on the feeble electric light that the shock came. At once he saw there was something on the table which did not belong there, and a second look left no room for doubt. Lying on its side — for it could not stand up alone — was the exotic spiky figure which in his monstrous dream he had broken off the fantastic balustrade. No detail was missing. The ridged, barrel-shaped center, the thin radiating arms, the knobs at each end, and the flat, slightly outward-curving starfish-arms spreading from those knobs — all were there. In the electric light the color seemed to be a kind of iridescent gray veined with green; and Gilman could see amidst his horror and bewilderment that one of the knobs ended in a jagged break, corresponding to its former point of attachment to the dream-railing.

ONLY HIS TENDENCY toward a dazed stupor prevented him from screaming aloud. This

fusion of dream and reality was too much to bear. Still dazed he clutched at the spiky thing and staggered downstairs to Landlord Dombrowski's quarters. The prayers of the loom-fixer were still sounding through the moldy halls, but Gilman did not mind them now. The landlord was in, and greeted him pleasantly. No, he had not seen that thing before and did not know anything about it. But his wife had said she found a funny tin thing in one of the beds when she fixed the rooms at noon, and maybe that was it. Dombrowski called her, and she waddled in. Yes, that was the thing. She had found it in the young gentleman's bed — on the side next to the wall. It had looked very queer to her, but of course the young gentleman had lots of queer things in his room — books and curios and pictures and markings on paper. She certainly knew nothing about it.

So Gilman climbed upstairs again in mental turmoil, convinced that he was either still dreaming or that his somnambulism had run to incredible extremes and led him to depredations in unknown places. Where had he got this outre thing? He did not recall seeing it in any museum in Arkham. It must have been somewhere, though; and the sight of it as he snatched it in his sleep must have caused the odd dream-picture of the balustraded terrace. Next

day he would make some very guarded inquiries — and perhaps see the nerve specialist.

Meanwhile he would try to keep track of his somnambulism. As he went upstairs across the garret hall he sprinkled about some flour which he had borrowed — with a frank admission as to its purpose — from the landlord. He had stopped at Elwood's door on the way, but had found all dark within. Entering his room, he placed the spiky thing on the table, and lay down in complete mental and physical exhaustion without pausing to undress. From the closed loft above the slanting ceiling he thought he heard a faint scratching and padding, but he was too disorganized even to mind it. That cryptical pull from the north was getting very strong again, though it seemed now to come from a lower place in the sky.

In the dazzling violet light of dream the old woman and the fanged, furry thing came again and with a greater distinctness than on any former occasion. This time they actually reached him, and he felt the crone's withered claws, clutching at him. He was pulled out of bed and into empty space, and for a moment he heard a rhythmic roaring and saw the twilight amorphousness of the vague abysses seething around him. But that moment was very brief, for presently he was in a crude,

windowless little space with rough beams and planks rising to a peak just above his head, and with a curious slanting floor underfoot. Propped level on that floor were low cases full of books of every degree of antiquity and disintegration, and in the center were a table and bench, both apparently fastened in place. Small objects of unknown shape and nature were ranged on the tops of the cases, and in the flaming violet light Gilman thought he saw a counterpart of the spiky image which had puzzled him so horribly. On the left the floor fell abruptly away, leaving a black triangular gulf out of which, after a second's dry rattling, there presently climbed the hateful little furry thing with the yellow fangs and bearded human face.

The evilly grinning beldame still clutched him, and beyond the table stood a figure he had never seen before — a tall, lean man of dead black coloration but without the slightest sign of negroid features; wholly devoid of either hair or beard, and wearing as his only garment a shapeless robe of some heavy black fabric. His feet were indistinguishable because of the table and bench, but he must have been shod, since there was a clicking whenever he changed position. The man did not speak, and bore no trace of expression on his small, regular features. He

merely pointed to a book of prodigious size which lay open on the table, while the beldame thrust a huge gray quill into Gilman's right hand. Over everything was a pall of intensely maddening fear, and the climax was reached when the furry thing ran up the dreamer's clothing to his shoulders and then down his left arm, finally biting him sharply in the wrist just below his cuff. As the blood spurted from this wound Gilman lapsed into a faint.

HE AWAKED ON the morning of the 22nd with a pain in his left wrist, and saw that his cuff was brown with dried blood. His recollections were very confused, but the scene with the black man in the unknown space stood out vividly. The rats must have bitten him as he slept, giving rise to the climax of that frightful dream. Opening the door, he saw that the floor on the corridor floor was undisturbed except for the huge prints of the loutish fellow who roamed at the other end of the garret. So he had not been sleep-walking this time. But something would have to be done about those rats. He would speak to the landlord about them. Again he tried to stop up the hole at the base of the slanting wall, wedging in a candlestick which seemed of about the right size. His ears were ringing horribly, as if with

the residual echoes of some horrible noise heard in dreams.

As he bathed and changed clothes he tried to recall what he had dreamed after the scene in the violet-litten space, but nothing definite would crystallize in his mind. That scene itself must have corresponded to the sealed loft overhead, which had begun to attack his imagination so violently, but later impressions were faint and hazy. There were suggestions of the vague, twilight abysses, and of still vaster, blacker abysses beyond them — abysses in which all fixed suggestions were absent. He had been taken there by the bubble-congeries and the little polyhedron which always dogged him; but they, like himself, had changed to wisps of mist in this farther void of ultimate blackness. Something else had gone on ahead — a larger wisp which now and then condensed into nameless approximations of form — and he thought that their progress had not been in a straight line, but rather along the alien curves and spirals of some ethereal vortex which obeyed laws unknown to the physics and mathematics of any conceivable cosmos. Eventually there had been a hint of vast, leaping shadows, of a monstrous, half-acoustic pulsing, and of the thin, monotonous piping of an unseen flute — but that was all. Gilman decided he had picked up that last concep-

tion from what he had read in the *Necronomicon* about the mindless entity Azathoth, which rules all time and space from a curiously envired black throne at the center of Chaos.

When the blood was washed away the wrist wound proved very slight, and Gilman puzzled over the location of the two tiny punctures. It occurred to him that there was no blood on the bedspread where he had lain — which was very curious in view of the amount on his skin and cuff. Had he been sleep-walking within his room, and had the rat bitten him as he sat in some chair or paused in some less rational position? He looked in every corner for brownish drops or stains, but did not find any. He had better, he thought, sprinkle flour within the room as well as outside the door — though after all no further proof of his sleep-walking was needed. He knew he did walk — and the thing to do now was to stop it. He must ask Frank Elwood for help. This morning the strange pulls from space seemed lessened, though they were replaced by another sensation even more inexplicable. It was a vague, insistent impulse to fly away from his present situation, but held not a hint of the specific direction in which he wished to fly. As he picked up the strange spiky image on the table he thought the older northward pull grew a trifle stronger; but

even so, it was wholly overruled by the newer and more bewildering urge.

HE TOOK THE spiky image down to Elwood's room, steeling himself against the whines of the loom-fixer which welled up from the ground floor. Elwood was in, thank heaven, and appeared to be stirring about. There was time for a little conversation before leaving for breakfast and college; so Gilman hurriedly poured forth an account of his recent dreams and fears. His host was very sympathetic, and agreed that something ought to be done. He was shocked by his guest's drawn, haggard aspect, and noticed the queer, abnormal-looking sunburn which others had remarked during the past week. There was not much, though, that he could say. He had not seen Gilman on any sleep-walking expedition, and had no idea what the curious image could be. He had, though, heard the French-Canadian who lodged just under Gilman talking to Mazurewicz one evening. They were telling each other how badly they dreaded the coming of Walpurgis Night, now only a few days off; and were exchanging pitying comments about the poor, doomed young gentleman. Desrochers, the fellow under Gilman's room, had spoken of nocturnal footsteps shod and unshod, and of the violet light he saw one night

when he had stolen fearfully up to peer through Gilman's keyhole. He had not dared to peer, he told Mazurewicz, after he had glimpsed that light through the cracks around the door. There had been soft talking, too — and as he began to describe it his voice had sunk to an inaudible whisper.

Elwood could not imagine what had set these people gossiping, but supposed their imaginations had been roused by Gilman's late hours and somnolent walking and talking on the one hand, and by the nearness of traditionally-feared May-Eve on the other hand. That Gilman talked in his sleep was plain, and it was obviously from Desrocher's keyhole-listenings that the delusive notion of the violet dream-light had got abroad. These simple people were quick to imagine they had seen any odd thing they had heard about. As for a plan of action — Gilman had better move down to Elwood's room and avoid sleeping alone. Elwood would, if awake, rouse him whenever he began to talk or rise in his sleep. Very soon, too, he must see the specialist. Meanwhile they would take the spiky image around to the various museums and to certain professors; seeking identification and stating that it had been found in a public rubbish-can. Also, Dombrowski must attend to the poisoning of those rats in the walls.

BRACED UP BY Elwood's companionship, Gilman attended classes that day. Strange urges still tugged at him, but he could sidetrack them with considerable success. During a free period he showed the queer image to several professors, all of whom were intensely interested, though none of them could shed any light upon its nature or origin. That night he slept on a couch which Elwood had had the landlord bring to the second-story room, and for the first time in weeks was wholly free from disquieting dreams. But the feverishness still hung on, and the whines of the loom-fixer were an unnerving influence.

During the next few days Gilman enjoyed an almost perfect immunity from morbid manifestations. He had, Elwood said, showed no tendency to talk or rise in his sleep; and meanwhile the landlord was putting rat-poison everywhere. The only disturbing element was the talk among the foreigners, whose imaginations had become highly excited. Mazurewicz was always trying to make him get a crucifix, and finally forced one upon him which he said had been blessed by the good Father Iwanicki. Desrochers, too, had something to say; in fact, he insisted that cautious steps had sounded in the now vacant room above him on the first and second nights of Gilman's absence from it. Paul Choynski thought

he heard sounds in the halls and on the stairs at night, and claimed that his door had been softly tried, while Mrs. Dombrowski vowed she had seen Brown Jenkin for the first time since All-Harrows. But such naive reports could mean very little, and Gilman let the cheap metal crucifix hang idly from a knob on his host's dresser.

For three days Gilman and Elwood canvassed the local museums in an effort to identify the strange spiky image, but always without success. In every quarter, however, interest was intense; for the utter alienage of the thing was a tremendous challenge to scientific curiosity. One of the small radiating arms was broken off and subjected to chemical analysis. Professor Ellery found platinum, iron and tellurium in the strange alloy; but mixed with these were at least three other apparent elements of high atomic weight which chemistry was absolutely powerless to classify. Not only did they fail to correspond with any known element, but they did not even fit the vacant places reserved for probable elements in the periodic system.

ON THE MORNING of April 27th a fresh rat-hole appeared in the room where Gilman was a guest, but Dombrowski tinned it up during the day. The poison was not having much effect, for scratching and scurryings in the

walls were virtually undiminished.

Elwood was out late that night, and Gilman waited up for him. He did not wish to go to sleep in a room alone — especially since he thought he had glimpsed in the evening twilight the repellent old woman whose image had become so horribly transferred to his dreams. He wondered who she was, and what had been near her rattling the tin cans in a rubbish-heap at the mouth of a squalid courtyard. The crone had seemed to notice him and leer evilly at him — though perhaps this was merely his imagination.

The next day both youths felt very tired, and knew they would sleep like logs when night came. In the evening they drowsily discussed the mathematical studies which had so completely and perhaps harmfully engrossed Gilman, and speculated about the linkage with ancient magic and folklore which seemed so darkly probable. They spoke of old Keziah Mason, and Elwood agreed that Gilman had good scientific grounds for thinking she might have stumbled on strange and significant information. The hidden cults to which these witches belonged often guarded and handed down surprising secrets from elder, forgotten eons; and it was by no means impossible that Keziah had actually mastered the art of

passing through dimensional gates. Tradition emphasizes the uselessness of material barriers in halting a witch's motions, and who can say what underlies the old tales of broomstick rides through the night?

Whether a modern student could ever gain similar powers from mathematical research alone, was still to be seen. Success, Gilman added, might lead to dangerous and unthinkable situations; for who could foretell the conditions prevailing in an adjacent but normally inaccessible dimension? On the other hand, the picturesque possibilities were enormous. Time could not exist in certain belts of space, and by entering and remaining in such a belt one might preserve one's life and age indefinitely; never suffering organic metabolism or deterioration except for slight amounts incurred during visits to one's own or similar planes. One might, for example, pass into a timeless dimension and emerge at some remote period of the earth's history as young as before.

Whether anybody had ever managed to do this, one could hardly conjecture with any degree of authority. Old legends are hazy and ambiguous, and in historic times all attempts at crossing forbidden gaps seem complicated by strange and terrible alliances with beings and messengers from outside. There was the immemorial figure of

the deputy or messenger of hidden and terrible powers — the "Black Man" of the witchcult, and the "Nyarlathotep" of the *Necronomicon*. There was, too, the baffling problem of the lesser messengers or intermediaries — the quasi-animals and queer hybrids which legend depicts as witches' familiars. As Gilman and Elwood retired, too sleepy to argue further, they heard Joe Mazurewicz reel into the house half drunk, and shuddered at the desperate wildness of his prayers.

THAT NIGHT GILMAN saw the violet light again. In his dream he had heard a scratching and gnawing in the partitions, and thought that some one fumbled clumsily at the latch. Then he saw the old woman and the small furry thing advancing toward him over the carpeted floor. The beldame's face was alight with inhuman exultation, and the little yellow-toothed morbidity tittered mockingly as it pointed at the hearty-sleeping form of Elwood on the other couch across the room. A paralysis of fear stifled all attempts to cry out. As once before, the hideous crone seized Gilman by the shoulders, yanking him out of bed and into empty space. Again the infinitude of the shrieking abysses flashed past him, but in another second he thought he was in a dark, muddy, unknown alley of

fetid odors with the rotting walls of ancient houses towering up on every hand.

Ahead was the robed black man he had seen in the peaked space in the other dream, while from a lesser distance the old woman was beckoning and grimacing imperiously. Brown Jenkin was rubbing itself with a kind of affectionate playfulness around the ankles of the black man, which the deep mud largely concealed. There was a dark open doorway on the right, to which the black man silently pointed. Into this the grinning crone started, dragging Gilman after her by his pajama sleeves. There were evil-smelling staircases which creaked ominously, and on which the old woman seemed to radiate a faint violet light; and finally a door leading off a landing. The crone fumbled with the latch and pushed the door open, motioning to Gilman to wait, and disappearing inside the black aperture.

The youth's over-sensitive ears caught a hideous strangled cry, and presently the beldame came out of the room bearing a small, senseless form which she thrust at the dreamer as if ordering him to carry it. The sight of this form, and the expression on its face, broke the spell. Still too dazed to cry out, he plunged recklessly down the noisome staircase and into the mud outside; halting only when seized and choked by the waiting black

man. As consciousness departed he heard the faint, shrill tittering of the fanged, rat-like abnormality.

ON THE MORNING of the 29th Gilman awaked into a maelstrom of horror. The instant he opened his eyes he knew something was terribly wrong, for he was back in his old garret room with the slanting wall and ceiling, sprawled on the now unmade bed. His throat was aching inexplicably, and as he struggled to a sitting posture he saw with growing fright that his feet and pajama bottoms were brown with caked mud. For the moment his recollections were hopelessly hazy, but he knew at least that he must have been sleepwalking. Elwood had been lost too deeply in slumber to hear and stop him. On the floor were confused muddy prints, but oddly enough they did not extend all the way to the door. The more Gilman looked at them, the more peculiar they seemed; for in addition to those he could recognize as his there were some smaller, almost round markings — such as the legs of a large chair or a table might make, except that most of them tended to be divided into halves. There were also some curious muddy rat-tracks leading out of a fresh hole and back into it again. Utter bewilderment and the fear of madness racked Gilman as he staggered to the door and saw

that there were no muddy prints outside. The more he remembered of his hideous dream the more terrified he felt, and it added to his desperation to hear Joe Mazurewicz chanting mournfully two floors below.

Descending to Elwood's room he roused his still-sleeping host and began telling of how he had found himself, but Elwood could form no idea of what might really have happened. Where Gilman could have been, how he got back to his room without making tracks in the hall, and how the muddy, furniture-like prints came to be mixed with his in the garret chamber, were wholly beyond conjecture. Then there were those dark, livid marks on his throat, as if he had tried to strangle himself. He put his hands up to them, but found that they did not even approximately fit. While they were talking, Desrochers dropped in to say that he had heard a terrific clattering overheard in the dark small hours. No, there had been no one on the stairs after midnight, though just before midnight he had heard faint footfalls in the garret, and cautiously descending steps he did not like. It was, he added, a very bad time of the year for Arkham. The younger gentleman had better be sure to wear the crucifix Joe Mazurewicz had given him. Even the daytime was not safe, for after dawn

there had been strange sounds in the house — especially a thin, childish wail hastily choked off.

GILMAN mechanically attended classes that morning, but was wholly unable to fix his mind on his studies. A mood of hideous apprehension and expectancy had seized him, and he seemed to be awaiting the fall of some annihilating blow. At noon he lunched at the University Spa, picking up a paper from the next seat as he waited for dessert. But he never ate that dessert; for an item on the paper's first page left him limp, wild-eyed, and able only to pay his check and stagger back to Elwood's room.

There had been a strange kidnapping the night before in Orne's Gangway, and the two-year-old child of a laundry worker named Anastasia Wolejko had completely vanished from sight. The mother, it appeared, had feared the event for some time; but the reasons she assigned for her fear were so grotesque that no one took them seriously. She had, she said, seen Brown Jenkin about the place now and then ever since early in March, and knew from its grimaces and titterings that little Ladislav must be marked for sacrifice at the awful Sabbath on Walpurgis Night. She had asked her neighbor Mary Czanek to sleep in the room and try to protect the child, but Mary had not dared.

She could not tell the police, for they never believed such things. Children had been taken that way every year ever since she could remember. And her friend Pete Stowacki would not help because he wanted the child out of the way.

But what threw Gilman into a cold perspiration was the report of a pair of revellers who had been walking past the mouth of the gangway just after midnight. They admitted they had been drunk, but both vowed they had seen a crazily dressed trio furtively entering the dark passage-way. There had, they said, been a huge robed negro, a little old woman in rags, and a young white man in his nightclothes. The old woman had been dragging the youth, while around the feet of the negro a tame rat was rubbing and weaving in the brown mud.

GILMAN SAT IN a daze all the afternoon, and Elwood — who had meanwhile seen the papers and formed terrible conjectures from them — found him thus when he came home. This time neither could doubt but that something hideously serious was closing in around them. Between the fantasies of nightmare and the realities of the objective world a monstrous and unthinkable relationship was crystallizing, and only stupendous vigilance could avert still more direful developments. Gil-

man must see a specialist sooner or later, but not just now, when all the papers were full of this kidnapping business.

Just what had really happened was maddeningly obscure, and for a moment both Gilman and Elwood exchanged whispered theories of the wildest kind. Had Gilman unconsciously succeeded better than he knew in his studies of space and its dimensions? Had he actually slipped outside our sphere to points unguessed and unimaginable? Where — if anywhere — had he been on those nights of demoniac alienage? The roaring twilight abysses — the green hillside — the blistering terrace — the pulls from the stars — the ultimate black vortex — the black man — the muddy alley and the stairs — the old witch and the fanged furry horror — the bubble-congeries and the little polyhedron — the strange sunburn — the wrist wound — the unexplained image — the muddy feet — the throat-marks — the tales and fears of the foreigners — what did all this mean? To what extent could the laws of sanity apply to such a case?

There was no sleep for either of them that night, but next day they both cut classes and drowsed. This was April 30th, and with the dusk would come the hellish Sabbath-time which all the foreigners and the superstitious old folk feared. Mazurewicz came home at six o'clock

and said people at the mill were whispering that the Walpurgis-revels would be held in the dark ravine beyond Meadow Hill where the old white stone stands in a place queerly devoid of all plant life. Some of them had even told the police and advised them to look there for the missing Wolejko child, but they did not believe anything would be done. Joe insisted that the poor young gentleman wear his nickel-chained crucifix, and Gilman put it on and dropped it inside his shirt to humor the fellow.

LATE AT NIGHT the two youths sat drowsing in their chairs, lulled by the praying of the loom-fixer on the floor below. Gilman listened as he nodded, his preternaturally sharpened hearing seeming to strain for some subtle, dreaded murmur beyond the noises in the ancient house. Unwholesome recollections of things in the *Necronomicon* and the *Black Book* welled up, and he found himself swaying to infamous rhythms said to pertain to the blackest ceremonies of the Sabbat and to have an origin outside the time and space we comprehend.

Presently he realized what he was listening for — the hellish chant of the celebrants in the distant dark valley. How did he know so much about what they expected? How did he know the

time when Nahab and her acolyte were due to bear the brimming bowl which would follow the black cock and the black goat? He saw that Elwood had dropped asleep, and tried to call out and waken him. Something, however, closed his throat. He was not his own master. Had he signed the black man's book after all?

Then his fevered, abnormal hearing caught the distant, wind-borne notes. Over miles of hill and field and alley they came, but he recognized them none the less. The fires must be lit, and the dancers must be starting in. How could he keep himself from going? What was it that had enmeshed him? Mathematics — folklore — the house — old Keziah — Brown Jenkin . . . and now he saw that there was a fresh rat-hole in the wall near his couch. Above the distant chanting and the nearer praying of Joe Mazurewicz came another sound — a stealthy, determined scratching in the partitions. He hoped the electric lights would not go out. Then he saw the fanged, bearded little face in the rat-hole — the accursed little face which he at last realized bore such a shocking, mocking resemblance to old Keziah's — and heard the faint fumbling at the door.

The screaming twilight abysses flashed before him, and he felt himself helpless in the formless grasp of the iridescent

bubble-congeries. Ahead raced the small, kaleidoscopic polyhedron, and all through the churning void there was a heightening and acceleration of the vague tonal pattern which seemed to foreshadow some unutterable and unendurable climax. He seemed to know what was coming — the monstrous burst of Walpurgis-rhythm in whose cosmic timbre would be concentrated all the primal, ultimate space-time seethings which lie behind the massed spheres of matter and sometimes break forth in measured reverberations that penetrate faintly to every layer of entity and give hideous significance throughout the worlds to certain dreaded periods.

But all this vanished in a second. He was again in the cramped, violet-litten peaked space with the slanting floor, the low cases of ancient books, the bench and a table, the queer objects, and the triangular gulf at one side. On the table lay a small white figure — an infant boy, unclothed and unconscious — while on the other side stood the monstrous, leering old woman with a gleaming, grotesque-hafted knife in her right hand, and a queerly proportioned pale metal bowl covered with curiously chased designs and having delicate lateral handles in her left. She was intoning some croaking ritual in a language which Gilman could not un-

derstand, but which seemed like something guardedly quoted in the *Necronomicon*.

AS THE SCENE grew clear he saw the ancient crone bend forward and extend the empty bowl across the table — and unable to control his own motions, he reached far forward and took it in both hands, noticing as he did so its comparative lightness. At the same moment the disgusting form of Brown Jenkin scrambled up over the brink of the triangular black gulf on his left. The crone now motioned him to hold the bowl in a certain position while she raised the huge, grotesque knife above the small white victim as high as her right hand could reach. The fanged, furry thing began tittering a continuation of the unknown ritual, while the witch croaked loathsome responses. Gilman felt a gnawing, poignant abhorrence shoot through his mental and emotional paralysis, and the light metal bowl shook in his grasp. A second later the downward motion of the knife broke the spell completely, and he dropped the bowl with a resounding bell-like clangor while his hands darted out frantically to stop the monstrous deed.

In an instant he had edged up the slanting floor around the end of the table and wrenched the knife from the old woman's claws; sending it clattering over

the brink of the narrow triangular gulf. In another instant, however, matters were reversed; for those murderous claws had locked themselves tightly around his own throat, while the wrinkled face was twisted with insane fury. He felt the chain of the cheap crucifix grinding into his neck, and in his peril wondered how the sight of the object itself would affect the evil creature. Her strength was altogether superhuman, but as she continued her choking he reached feebly in his shirt and drew out the metal symbol, snapping the chain and pulling it free.

At sight of the device the witch seemed struck with panic, and her grip relaxed long enough to give Gilman a chance to break it entirely. He pulled the steel-like claws from his neck, and would have dragged the beldame over the edge of the gulf had not the claws received a fresh access of strength and closed in again. This time he resolved to reply in kind, and his own hands reached out for the creature's throat. Before she saw what he was doing he had the chain of the crucifix twisted about her neck, and a moment later he had tightened it enough to cut off her breath. During her last struggle he felt something bite at his angle, and saw that Brown Jenkin had come to her aid. With one savage kick he sent the morbidity over the edge of the gulf and heard it whimper

on some level far below.

Whether he had killed the ancient crone he did not know, but he let her rest on the floor where she had fallen. Then, as he turned away, he saw on the table a sight which nearly snapped the last thread of his reason. Brown Jenkin, tough of sinew and with four tiny hands of demoniac dexterity, had been busy while the witch was throttling him, and his efforts had been in vain. What he had prevented the knife from doing to the victim's chest, the yellow fangs of the furry blasphemy had done to a wrist — and the bowl so lately on the floor stood full beside the small lifeless body.

IN HIS DREAM-DELIRIUM Gilman heard the hellish alien-rhythmed chant of the Sabbath coming from an infinite distance, and knew the black man must be there. Confused memories mixed themselves with his mathematics, and he believed his subconscious mind held the *angles* which he needed to guide him back to the normal world alone and unaided for the first time. He felt sure he was in the immemorially sealed loft above his own room, but whether he could ever escape through the slanting floor or the long-stopped egress he doubted greatly. Besides, would not an escape from a dream-loft bring him merely into a dream-house — an abnormal projection of the actual

place he sought? He was wholly bewildered as to the relation betwixt dream and reality in all his experiences.

The passage through the vague abysses would be frightful, for the Walpurgis-rhythm would be vibrating, and at last he would have to hear that hitherto-veiled cosmic pulsing which he so mortally dreaded. Even now he could detect a low, monstrous shaking whose tempo he suspected all too well. At Sabbat-time it always mounted and reached through to the worlds to summon the initiate to nameless rites. Half the chants of the Sabbat were patterned on this faintly overhead pulsing which no earthly ear could endure in its unveiled spatial fullness. Gilman wondered, too, whether he could trust his instincts to take him back to the right part of space. How could he be sure he would not land on that green-litten hillside of a far planet, on the tessellated terrace above the city of tentacled monsters somewhere beyond the galaxy, or in the spiral black vortices of that ultimate void of Chaos where reigns the mindless demon-sultan Azathoth?

Just before he made the plunge the violet light went out and left him in utter blackness. The witch — old Keziah — Nahab — that must have meant her death. And mixed with the distant chant of the Sabbat and the whimpers of Brown Jenkin in

the gulf below he thought he heard another and wilder whine from unknown depths. Joe Mazurewicz — the prayers against the Crawling Chaos now turning to an inexplicably triumphant shriek — worlds of sardonic actuality impinging on vortices of febrile dream — *Ia! Shub-Nigurath! The Goat with a Thousand and Young.* . .

THEY FOUND GILMAN on the floor of his queerly-angled old garret room long before dawn, for the terrible cry had brought Desrochers and Choynski and Dombrowski and Mazurewicz at once, and had even wakened the soundly sleeping Elwood in his chair. He was alive, and with open, staring eyes, but seemed largely unconscious. On his throat were the marks of murderous hands, and on his left ankle was a distressing rat-bite. His clothing was badly rumpled, and Joe's crucifix was missing. Elwood trembled, afraid even to speculate on what new form his friend's sleep-walking had taken. Mazurewicz seemed half dazed because of a "sign" he said he had in response to his prayers, and he crossed himself frantically when the squealing and whimpering of a rat sounded from beyond the slanting partition.

When the dreamer was settled on his couch in Elwood's room they sent for Doctor Mal-

kowski — a local practitioner who would repeat no tales where they might prove embarrassing — and he gave Gilman two hypodermic injections which caused him to relax in something like natural drowsiness. During the day the patient regained consciousness at times and whispered his newest dream disjointedly to Elwood. It was a painful process, and at its very start brought out a fresh and disconcerting fact.

Gilman — whose ears had so lately possessed an abnormal sensitiveness — was now stone-deaf. Doctor Malkowski, summoned again in haste, told Elwood that both ear-drums were ruptured, as if by the impact of some stupendous sound intense beyond all human conception or endurance. How such a sound could have been heard in the last few hours without arousing all the Miskatonic Valley was more than the honest physician could say.

Elwood wrote his part of the colloquy on paper, so that a fairly easy communication was maintained. Neither knew what to make of the whole chaotic business, and decided it would be better if they thought as little as possible about it. Both, though, agreed that they must leave this ancient and accursed house as soon as it could be arranged. Evening papers spoke of a police raid on some curious revellers in a ravine beyond

Meadow Hill just before dawn, and mentioned that the white stone there was an object of age-long superstitious regard. Nobody had been caught, but among the scattering fugitives had been glimpsed a huge negro. In another column it was stated that no trace of the missing child Ladislav Wolejko had been found.

THE CROWNING horror came that very night. Elwood will never forget it, and was forced to stay out of college the rest of the term because of the resulting nervous breakdown. He had thought he heard rats in the partitions all the evening, but paid little attention to them. Then, long after both he and Gilman had retired, the atrocious shrieking began. Elwood jumped up, turned on the lights, and rushed over to his guest's couch. The occupant was emitting sounds of veritably inhuman nature, as if racked by some torment beyond description. He was writhing under the bedclothes, and a great red stain was beginning to appear on the blankets.

Elwood scarcely dared to touch him, but gradually the screaming and writhing subsided. By this time Dombrowski, Choynski, Desrochers, Mazurewicz, and the top-floor lodger were all crowding into the doorway, and the landlord had sent his wife back to telephone for

Doctor Malkowski. Everybody shrieked when a large rat-like form suddenly jumped out from beneath the ensanguined bed-clothes and scuttled across the floor to a fresh, open hole close by. When the doctor arrived and began to pull down those frightful covers Walter Gilman was dead.

It would be barbarous to do more than suggest what had killed Gilman. There had been virtually a tunnel through his body — something had eaten his heart out. Dombrowski, frantic at the failure of his rat-poisoning efforts, cast aside all thought of his lease and within a week had moved with all his older lodgers to a dingy but less ancient house in Walnut Street. The worst thing for a while was keeping Joe Mazurewicz quiet; for the brooding loom-fixer would never stay sober, and was constantly whining and muttering about spectral and terrible things.

It seems that on that last hideous night Joe had stooped to look at the crimson rat-tracks which led from Gilman's couch to the near-by hole. On the carpet they were very indistinct, but a piece of open flooring intervened between the carpet's edge and the baseboard. There Mazurewicz had found something monstrous — or thought he had, for no one else could quite agree with him despite the undeniable queeriness of the

prints. The tracks on the flooring were certainly vastly unlike the average prints of a rat, but even Choynski and Desrochers would not admit that they were like the prints of four tiny human hands.

THE HOUSE was never rented again. As soon as Dombrowski left it the pall of its final desolation began to descend, for people shunned it both on account of its old reputation and because of the new fetid odor. Perhaps the ex-landlord's rat-poison had worked after all, for not long after his departure the place became a neighborhood nuisance. Health officials traced the smell to the closed spaces above and beside the eastern garret room, and agreed that the number of dead rats must be enormous. They decided, however, that it was not worth their while to hew open and disinfect the long-sealed spaces; for the fetor would soon be over, and the locality was not one which encouraged fastidious standards. Indeed, there were always vague local tales of unexplained stench upstairs in the Witch-House just after May-Eve and Hallowmass. The neighbors acquiesced in the inertia — but the fetor none the less formed an additional count against the place. Toward the last the house was condemned as a habitation by the building inspector.

Gilman's dreams and their at-

tendant circumstances have never been explained. Elwood, whose thoughts on the entire episode are sometimes almost maddening, came back to college the next autumn and graduated in the following June. He found the spectral gossip of the town much diminished, and it is indeed a fact that — notwithstanding certain reports of a ghostly tittering in the deserted house which lasted almost as long as that edifice itself — no fresh appearances either of Old Keziah or of Brown Jenkin have been muttered of since Gilman's death. It is rather fortunate that Elwood was not in Arkham in that later year when certain events abruptly renewed horrors. Of course he heard about the matter afterward and suffered untold torments of black and bewildered speculation; but even that was not as bad as actual nearness and several possible sights would have been.

IN MARCH, 1931, a gale wrecked the roof and great chimney of the vacant Witch-House, so that a chaos of crumbling bricks, blackened, moss-grown shingles, and rotting planks and timbers crashed down into the loft and broke through the floor beneath. The whole attic story was choked with debris from above, but no one took the trouble to touch the mess before the inevitable

razing of the decrepit structure. That ultimate step came in the following December, and it was when Gilman's old room was cleared out by reluctant, apprehensive workmen that the gossip began.

Among the rubbish which had crashed through the ancient slanting ceiling were several things which made the workmen pause and call in the police. Later the police in turn called in the coroner and several professors from the university. There were bones — badly crushed and splintered, but clearly recognizable as human — whose manifestly modern date conflicted puzzlingly with the remote period at which their only possible lurking place, the low, slant-floored loft overhead, had supposedly been sealed from all human access. The coroner's physician decided that some belonged to a small child, while certain others — found mixed with shreds of rotten brownish cloth — belonged to a rather undersized, bent female of advanced years. Careful sifting of debris also disclosed many tiny bones of rats caught in the collapse, as well as older rat-bones gnawed by small fangs in a fashion now and then highly productive of controversy and reflection.

Other objects found included the mangled fragments of many books and papers, together with a yellowish dust left from the

total disintegration of still older books and papers. All, without exception, appeared to deal with black magic in its most advanced and horrible forms; and the evidently recent date of certain items is still a mystery as unsolved as that of the modern human bones. An even greater mystery is the absolute homogeneity of the crabbed, archaic writing found on a wide range of papers whose conditions and watermarks suggest age differences of at least 150 to 200 years. To some, though, the greatest mystery of all is the variety of utterly inexplicable objects — objects whose shapes, materials, types of workmanship, and purposes baffle all conjecture — found scattered amidst the wreckage in evidently diverse states of injury. One of these things — which excited several Miskatonic professors profoundly — is a badly damaged monstrosity plainly resembling the strange image which Gilman gave to the college museum, save that it is larger, wrought of some peculiar bluish stone instead of metal, and possessed of a singularly angled pedestal with undecipherable hieroglyphics.

Archeologists and anthropologists are still trying to explain the bizarre designs chased on a crushed bowl of light metal whose inner side bore ominous brownish stains when found.

Foreigners and credulous grandmothers are equally garrulous about the modern nickel crucifix with broken chain mixed in the rubbish and shiveringly identified by Joe Mazurewicz as that which he had given poor Gilman many years before. Some believe this crucifix was dragged up to the sealed loft by rats, while others think it must have been on the floor in some corner of Gilman's old room all the time. Still others, including Joe himself, have theories too wild and fantastic for sober credence.

WHEN THE slanting wall of Gilman's room was torn out, the once sealed triangular space between that partition and the house's north wall was found to contain much less structural debris, even in proportion to its size, than the room itself; though it had a ghastly layer of older materials which paralyzed the wreckers with horror. In brief, the floor was a veritable ossuary of the bones of small children — some fairly modern, but others extending back in infinite gradations to a period so remote that crumbling was almost complete. On this deep bony layer rested a knife of great size, obvious antiquity, and grotesque, ornate, and exotic design — above which the debris was piled.

In the midst of this debris, wedged between a fallen plank

and a cluster of cemented bricks from the ruined chimney, was an object destined to cause more bafflement, veiled fright, and openly superstitious talk in Arkham than anything else discovered in the haunted and accursed building. This object was the partly crushed skeleton of a huge diseased rat, whose abnormalities of form are still a topic of debate and source of singular reticence among the members of Miskatonic's department of comparative anatomy. Very little concerning this skeleton has leaked out, but the workmen who found it whisper in shocked tones about the long,

brownish hairs with which it was associated.

The bones of the tiny paws, it is rumored, imply prehensile characteristics more typical of a diminutive monkey than of a rat, while the small skull with its savage yellow fangs is of the utmost anomalousness, appearing from certain angles like a miniature, monstrously degraded parody of a human skull. The workmen crossed themselves in fright when they came upon this blasphemy, but later burned candles of gratitude in St. Stanislaus' Church because of the shrill, ghostly tittering they felt they would never hear again.

As we noted in "It Is Written", we shall await more comments from you, the readers, before deciding on whether to use further articles in **Magazine Of Horror**. However, since typing copy for that department, we received a suggestion that we try to reprint H. P. Lovecraft's classic essay, "Supernatural Horror In Literature".

This is a long article, and would have to be run in installments were we to offer it to you, as it could not be condensed in the digest manner. What do you think? Would you like to see it?

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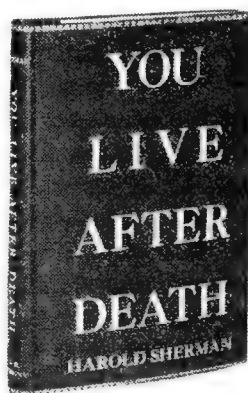
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Coming Next Issue

Brutus was waiting for me at the kitchen door, a hand to his left cheek, holding a handkerchief rolled into a ball. Even in the moonlight I could see that this makeshift dressing was bright red. Brutus, it appeared, had suffered another attack of some kind. I took him into the house and upstairs, and dressed the three wounds in his left cheek in my bathroom. He had been awakened without warning, fifteen minutes before, with a sudden hurt, had straightened up in bed, but not before two more stabs, directly through the cheek, had been delivered. He had only just seen the Thing scrambling down over the foot of the bed, as he came awake under the impetus of these stabs, and, after a hasty search for the attacker, had wisely devoted himself to staunching his bleeding face. Then, trembling in every limb, he had stepped out into the yard and come under my window to call me.

The three holes through the man's cheek were of equal size and similar appearance, obviously inflicted by some stabbing implement of about the diameter of a quarter-inch. The first stab, Brutus thought, had been the one highest up, and this one had not only penetrated into the mouth like the others, but had severely scratched the gum of the upper jaw just above his eye-tooth. I talked to him as I dressed these three wounds. "So the Thing must have been concealed inside your room, you think, Brutus?"

"Undoubtedly, sar," returned Brutus "There was no possible way for It to crawl in 'pon me — de door shut tight, de window-screen undisturb', sar."

The poor fellow was trembling from head to foot with shock and fear, and I accompanied him back to his cabin. He had not lighted his lamp. It was only by the light of the moon that he had seen his assailant disappear over the foot of the bed. He had seized the handkerchief and run out into the yard in his pajamas.

I lit the lamp, determining to have electricity put into the cabin the next day, and, with Brutus' assistance, looked carefully over the room. Nothing, apparently, was hidden anywhere; there was only a little space to search through; Brutus had few belongings; the cabin furniture was adequate but scanty. There were no superfluities, no place, in other words, in which the Thing could hide itself.

Whatever had attacked Brutus was indeed going about its work with vicious cunning and determination.

You will not want to miss this strange and suspenseful tale of the West Indies, and the malevolent little Thing Canevin sought.

C A S S I U S

by Henry S. Whitehead

If You Missed Our Previous Issues

There are still a few copies left.

August 1963: *The Man With A Thousand Legs*, by Frank Belknap Long; *A Thing Of Beauty*, by Wallace West; *The Yellow Sign*, by Robert W. Chambers; *The Maze And The Monster*, by Edward D. Hoch; *The Death Of Halpin Frauser*, by Ambrose Bierce; *Babylon: 70 M.*, by Donald A. Wollheim; *The Inexperienced Ghost*, by H. G. Wells; *The Unbeliever*, by Robert Silverberg; *Fidel Bassin*, by W. J. Stamper; *The Last Dawn*, by Frank Lillie Pollock; *The Undying Head*, by Mark Twain.

November 1963: *The Space-Eaters*, by Frank Belknap Long; *The Faceless Thing*, by Edward D. Hoch; *The Red Room*, by H. G. Wells; *Hungary's Female Vampire*, by Dean Lipton; *A Tough Tussle*, by Ambrose Bierce; *Doorslammer*, by Donald A. Wollheim; *The Electric Chair*, by George Waight; *The Other One*, by Jerryl L. Keane; *The Charmer*, by Archie Binns; *Clarissa*, by Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Strange Ride Of Morrowbie Jukes*, by Rudyard Kipling.

February 1964: *The Seeds Of Death*, by David H. Keller; *The Seeking Thing*, by Janet Hirsch; *A Vision Of Judgment*, by H. G. Wells; *The Place Of The Pythons*, by Arthur J. Burks; *Jean Bouchon*, by S. Baring-Gould; *The Door*, by Rachel Cosgrove Payes; *One Summer Night*, by Ambrose Bierce; *Luella Miller*, by Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *They That Wait*, by H. S. W. Chibbett; *The Repairer Of Reputations*, by Robert W. Chambers.

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INTRODUCTION (*Continued From Page 4*)

Today, the underlying ethos seems to be the exact opposite. Where, among the Victorians, spiritual realities — both good and evil — were explored as widely as possible under the circumstances, and innumerable physical ones deriving from sick and corrupted spirits were forbidden territory, not even to be whispered in decent society, it is the spiritual realities that one doesn't speak about today — lest a blush be brought to the maidenly cheeks of materialistic superstitions. However, the lid's off and "realism" consists of unlimited exposure of everything even remotely genital.

Sado-masochism, in its endless varieties can, indeed, make for bizarre, gruesome, and frightening fiction; and we are not averse to offering you an occasional exhibit which we feel is striking and effective — but horror does not begin and end here, as numerous of our would-be contributors seem to imagine.

In fact, it becomes quite boring, after a while. RAWL

It is Written . . .

Keith Darland writes from Toronto, "I enjoyed your last (November) issue immensely, as I did the first. The stories were of true **Weird Tales** quality. And because of this quality I can pick up your magazine thinking of that old periodical which I, not being born soon enough, never saw or noticed on the newsstands but appreciate just as much as if it were still alive."

We cannot, of course, be a second **Weird Tales**, nor does your editor wish to make **Magazine Of Horror and Strange Stories** a second **Weird Tales** — whatever we are, we want to be a unique individual. But this does not gainsay the fact that we greatly loved the older magazine, and are trying to move in some of the directions it did, where we feel it was at its best.

"I would like to see stories having to do with the Devil, or the Devil as a character," writes Bruce E. Dunn, from a military post. "I also enjoy stories on the order of **The Electric Chair**, where a person has a choice of certain or uncertain death, or a possible escape. Also, may I refer you to a humorous tale of Poe's **Never Bet The Devil Your Head**, and to his horror tale, **The Oblong Box**? These are perhaps as unknown as some of his other stories are well-known."

We have an unusual "deal with the Devil" story on hand, which we hope to present in our next issue. It has been a long time since we read the two stories you mention, but we'll look into them as possibilities.

James Turner, of Collinsville, Illinois, chides us with, "I wish that you would refrain from publishing stories by authors such as Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, H. G. Wells, and Rudyard Kipling — while cognizant of the literary quality of these great masters, I fail to see the necessity of reprinting stories which are so widely available and easily accessible. As you probably know, the complete works of the above four are currently in print, which makes the re-

printing in a magazine negligible in my opinion, especially since there are so many deserving 'forgotten classics' in **Weird Tales** and other sources."

While we have dealt with this objection before, we do not feel it fair to let readers think that our mind is closed on the matter. So far, the response from readers who have expressed appreciation of our reprinting the material to which you object for outweighs the objections. We do feel that the tried-and-true enthusiast — the person who is on the lookout for such material — is inclined to overestimate the availability and accessibility of the complete short stories of Twain, Bierce, Wells, and Kipling. Even more important, such a person is inclined to overlook the fact that, although the complete works of Bierce (for example) can be purchased in one volume, many, many persons are encountering Bierce in these pages for the very first time, or are not inclined to buy the complete works.

This question, however, is one wherein we will respect the majority opinion of our readers as soon as we can get a reasonable idea of just what it is. So long as a plurality favors such reprints, we feel that we ought to present them — although we do intend to space out the better-known masters you mention more widely in future issues. Thus, we urge those of you who have not already expressed your feelings to do so. We are keeping a list both of voters and their votes, and will occasionally present comments here, on both sides, so that all can see how the question stands at the moment. While we, ourselves, are in favor of such reprints, we're not bringing this magazine out to please one person only, so your wishes do take precedence.

Sandra L. Foster, of Hampton, Virginia, also chides us, saying, "I object to your choice of Kipling's **Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes**. I bought this November issue of your magazine to read stories of supernatural horror — not cruelty to animals. In the future I shall spend my fifty cents elsewhere."

Reader's Preference Coupon

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I liked the following items best in the May issue:

I did not care for the following items:

While "supernatural" horror is certainly part of our fare, we feel that all aspects of horror are within our province.

"The 'horror' title does not seem to do justice to the talents you employ," writes Ralph Cohen, of Washington, D. C. "The classic 'horrors' were frightening to the imagination, but I do not think that any of the authors contemplated the debasing of the word to include the lurid accounts of mass perversions that are usually the fare of modern readers."

While the term "horror" has been corrupted, as so many other terms have, we hope that it has not been corrupted beyond recall.

"I have read your first issue through," writes Leonard C. Hample, of Butte, Montana, "and thoroughly enjoyed all of it. Every choice you made was, to my mind, excellent. Of course, I had already read some of the selections in years gone by, but appreciated the opportunity to read them again."

Readers, which stories did you like best in this issue? While we most appreciate a listing which rates them all (ties are always acceptable, by the way), any listing which mentions more than one story is of some value to us. And we want to know, of course, if there were any stories which aroused your positive dislike.

Your votes and comments showed the following to be the best-liked stories in our November issue: (1) **Clarissa**, by Robert A. W. Lowndes; (2) **The Space-Eaters**, by Frank Belknap Long; (3) **The Charmer**, by Archie Binns; (4) **The Faceless Thing**, by Edward D. Hoch; (5) **The Strange Ride Of Morrowbie Jukes**, by Rudyard Kipling. Of the eleven stories in the issue, only numbers one and three above escaped dislike from at least one reader. Most controversial was **A Tough Tussle**, by Ambrose Bierce. RAWL

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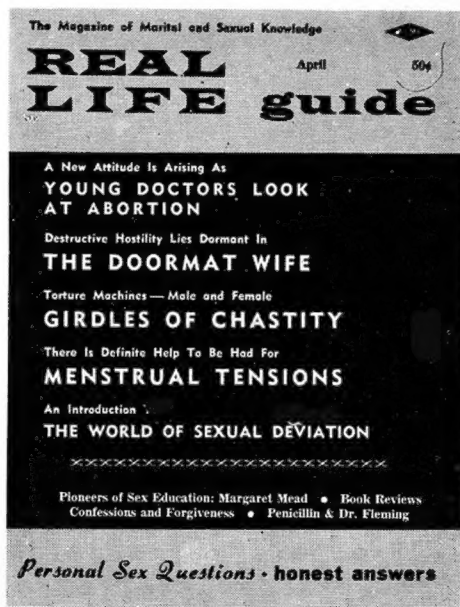
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